

## **The Rise of Clickbait Headlines: A Study on Media Platforms from Bangladesh**

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The purpose of the study is to find out the actual numbers or ratio of clickbait headlines used by specific Bangladeshi media, the reason behind the rise of clickbait headlines in the era of social media, and to disclose the perception of media personnel regarding clickbait headlines and their effect on audiences' credibility. The qualitative method of research has been followed for the research. Content of four top-ranked media of Bangladesh have been analyzed and 12 media personnel from these media outlets have been interviewed. The study revealed a huge presence of clickbait components in each media's content. Factors like getting more clicks to generate money, competition, and audience demand have been identified behind the rise of clickbait headlines in recent times. Media personnel have acknowledged that clickbait headlines have some negative effects on various dimensions, of which, losing audience credibility is notable.

*Keywords:* clickbait, social media, competition, credibility, Facebook

### **Introduction**

Media's struggle to attract audiences on digital platforms with numerous below-standard content is a remarkable thing in recent years. Mainstream media, especially print media has been under pressure from falling sales and advertising revenue and increased competition (Palau-Sampio, 2016). Currently, print media across the world are witnessing a severe drop in their circulation. The newspaper circulation fell from over 63 million to less than 28 million per day in the USA between 1984 and 2018. The advertising revenues fell from a high of nearly \$50 billion to \$14 billion between 2005 and 2018. In 2006, a total of 74,000 journalists, editors, photographers, and associated staff worked in US newsrooms while the figure had virtually halved to 38,000 in 2018 (Spillane et al., 2020). In the meantime, the Internet has become a dominant medium of communication. Following this, the concept of online news portals has become very popular across the world. To get the most updated information and news, audiences' dependency on online news portals or media websites increased instead of mainstream media (Bazaco et al., 2019). As a result, media owners and personnel shifted their minds and started investing more in their websites and apps, providing their news for free, rather than selling it in print editions. There is extreme pressure on journalists

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to attract readers to their articles with catchy headlines to get more clicks. As a result, the journalists started practicing clickbait headlines to lure readers to click on the linked article.

Clickbait headlines can be defined as a type of catchy headline that attracts readers to click on them and link to accompanying articles. These headlines are typically hyperlinked to the respective articles and shared on news websites and social media platforms like Facebook to reach more audiences (Agrawal, 2016). Notably, these headlines are intentionally made to lure more social media users to share these contents on their profiles. Many renowned news organizations have already begun to publish increasing amounts of sensational, exaggerated, and celebrity-focused content. In such a situation, media outlets are not very much concerned about the impact of these types of clickbait headlines on the audiences' credibility (Nolan, 2017). How the audiences or readers react to these headlines is not the prime concern of the media. Media owners and personnel, however, focused more on making sensational content to attract more audiences on their social media pages and websites. Instead of being concerned about audience perception, they highlighted designing these sorts of content.

Considering the matter, this study is designed to find out the ratio of these clickbait headlines shared by a media outlet on the Facebook platform at a specific time and to disclose the reason behind the rise of clickbait headlines in recent times. Another aim of the study is to unearth the perception of Bangladeshi media personnel about the effect of clickbait headlines on the trustworthiness of the audience.

### **Background of the Study**

Compared to the previous decade, the current media environment is different as it is experiencing a severe drop in the circulation of print newspapers. Readers nowadays depend more on online to get news and current information to keep themselves updated (Salman et al., 2011). Following the rise of various social media, the number of readers, who looked for newspapers or traditional media, gradually decreased in recent times. Newspaper subscriptions are decreasing, because consumers are realizing they can read the same content online for free (Everett, 2011). Instead of reading newspapers, magazines, or articles, they preferred to read web pages. Readers mostly visit the websites of the media outlets as almost all the media have their respective websites. Search engines like Google are now so powerful that media tycoons believe that it has been forcing the newspaper industry to death's door (Mahmud, 2009). Media nowadays has started practising a new form of journalism with the help of modern technology which can be called media convergence. Besides, readers used to visit the social media platforms of these media outlets because it seems easier for them as they spend most of their time on social media. Here, the link between the readers and these websites has been subtly made by social media. In the economic context, the methods to disseminate information online are also changing in recent times. The number of readers who visit news media websites through search engines is

decreasing while there is an increase in the number of users who reach news through social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, mainly through news media pages (Bazaco et al., 2019). A little under half (48%) of US adults say they get news from social media often or sometimes, a 5% decline compared with 2020, according to a survey by Pew Research Center. About 31% of US adults say they get news regularly on Facebook, while about one in five Americans (22%) say they regularly get news on YouTube. Twitter and Instagram are regular news sources for 13% and 11% of Americans, respectively (Walker and Matsa, 2021).

The number of social media users is increasing daily across the world, Bangladesh, however, is not an exception. According to The Digital Report, a report published in February 2021 by global media company We Are Social, the total number of social media users in Bangladesh is now 45 million while 9 million of them joined social platforms between 2020 and 2021. The report revealed that the number of social media users is equivalent to 27.2% of the total population of the country (The Digital Report, 2021). Besides, there were 52,820,000 Facebook users in Bangladesh as of August 2021, which accounted for 30.6% of the country's entire population, as per NapoleonCat, a Polish-based social media management platform. Following the rise of social media users, Bangladeshi media houses are focusing on social media more to grab the attention of more users. The number of followers on Bangladeshi social media pages of media outlets indicates the dependency of people on social media to get information from the mainstream media. As of September 2021, Prothom Alo has more than 17 million followers on their verified Facebook page while the number is over 7 million for Kaler Kantho, 7 million for Daily Jugantor, 2 million for Daily Ittefaq, 2 million for Samakal, 1 million for Daily Manab Zamin, 3 million for The Daily Star and 1 million for Dhaka Tribune. The number of followers on the Facebook pages of television channels is even higher than the newspapers. Popular television channel NTV has more than 16 million followers on their official Facebook page while over 13 million people follow RTV, 11 million people follow Somoy TV, 8 million people follow Jamuna Television, 7 million people follow Ekattor TV, 4 million people follow Channel 24 and 4 million people follow DBC news. Apart from newspaper and television channels, several online news portals have millions of followers on their official Facebook page. More than 9 million people follow bdnews24.com on their official Facebook pages, the number is over 5 million for Daily Bangladesh, 4 million for jagonews24.com, 4 million for banglanews24.com, 4 million for Bangla Tribune, and 2 million for Dhaka Post.

All these numbers of followers on different official Facebook pages of media outlets indicate how much Bangladeshi people are dependent on social media especially on Facebook pages to keep themselves updated. Following the interest of the users on social media, all the mainstream Bangladeshi media outlets have started prioritizing social media platforms more for the last few years. New analytical software tools have been used to monitor the preferences of their audience. A separate section has been appointed to monitor these things which work to identify what type of photos, headlines, themes, and frames are the most attractive. Following the report provided by the section, they aimed to provide

news, content, headlines, and photos following the preferences of their audience (Bazaco et al., 2019). These things guide the media to practice a poor form of journalism that is viral journalism. The practice of viral journalism affects news selection and production processes considering the preferences of social network users. Besides, the media use tricky headlines that force the user into clicking, making videos that are specifically edited for dissemination on Facebook. Nowadays the core intention of media is to spread or disseminate their content, news, and videos by their social media followers rather than providing accurate, objective, and unbiased news to their audience. As the circulation of newspapers decreased in recent times, they took this new strategy as an alternative to it. Along with the other media outlets across the world, this new trend of practicing ‘clickbait’ headlines is now very common in Bangladeshi media. Journalists nowadays are more intent on enticing their audiences with these types of clickbait headlines.

### Literature Review

The term ‘clickbait’ was coined in 2006 by Jay Beiger who used it in a blog post of his. The term was simply a combination of the word ‘click’ referring to clicking on a thumbnail or link and then ‘bait’ as in baiting viewers like a fish on a hook. A decade later it officially became a part of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the vocabulary of every modern technology user (Karadanaian, 2021). However, many believe that the rise of clickbait journalism started in times of the short attention span of the audience during the Internet age. But this idea is wrong as clickbait’s history goes back to the 19th century. Even in the 1800s, a form of this term and tactic was used when yellow journalists would use sensational news and exaggerated headlines for the audience to serve specific purposes (Newitz, 2014). In the nineteenth century, newspapers were fighting for circulation numbers the same way social media sites compete for unique visitors in recent times. Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World and William Randolph Hearst’s New York Journal were engaged in a circulation war in the mid-1880s. After one point, the two newspapers had neck-to-neck sales. In a bid to surpass the other, they started over-dramatizing the news. Pulitzer introduced a popular comic strip in his newspaper to boost its circulation. He patronized the adventures of a kid, which later came to be known as the ‘yellow’ kid, as it wore an oversized yellow nightshirt. With the help of the yellow kid, they started sensationalizing stories and discrediting the leads of other newspapers (Vig, 2021). That was the first step forward to mislead the audience with exaggerated headlines and sensational news.

A headline is the title of a newspaper story, printed or placed in large letters at the top of the story. Headlines, in a traditional sense, can be defined as short, riveting synopses of their corresponding news items seeking to perform two functions: to summarize the story and to attract attention to the full-text article (Ifantidou, 2008). With a minimum of words, headlines aim at getting the attention of readers. The shape, structure, and choice of words in the headlines play a crucial role in attracting readers and thus influencing their choice of articles. The function

of the headline of a news article has changed. Previously, the primary function of a headline was to give the reader, who was scanning the newspaper, a clear understanding of what the article was about (Dijk, 1988). However, since many headlines are not read within the context of a newspaper anymore, the function of the headline has shifted. The headline, being one of the primary ways to attract the readers' attention, should above all make the reader curious as to what the article is about so that it lures the reader into opening the article (Chen et al., 2015). Headlines that provide content-based information, are mostly used to grab the attention of the audience. Nowadays, attention-grabbing clickbait headlines are very common tools for journalists to seek the attention of the audience in the era of social media. Headlines and body of news reports have become particularly discursive in new journalism's writing styles. The readers' experience of online news media today is a type of trickery. Firstly, the reader is directed by an overwhelming headline and then they encounter irrelevant content (Paksoy, 2014). Nowadays, a headline is often the primary way of getting a potential reader interested in an article. This has led to something known as clickbait. Clickbait can be seen as a specific style of writing that aims at inducing the inquisitiveness of the reader and to bait that reader into clicking and opening the article (Kuiken et al., 2017). Catchy headlines that lure readers to click on them and link to accompanying articles are called 'clickbait'. The term is commonly used in a negative light to describe headlines that are sensationalized, and upon clicking, one is redirected to misleading, unsatisfactory, or advertisement-like content (Kaushal and Vemuri, 2021). Clickbait links in social media are exaggerated headlines whose main motive is to mislead the reader to click on them. They create a nuisance in the online experience by creating a lure towards poor content (Agrawal, 2016). Curtis (2020) showed that viral content can bring financial profit by gaining additional traffic, growing an audience base, and/or generating 'clickbait' that translates into increasing financial value via their social media profiles (Danga, 2021).

Social media or social network sites can be described as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Among all the social media sites existing nowadays, Facebook is a giant with billions of users. According to eBIZ MBA, Facebook has a total of 2,200,000,000 unique monthly visitors as of September 1, 2021. Every organization, including media outlets, has an official Facebook page. It seems almost impossible to get a larger amount of audience at a time without the Facebook community in recent times. As a result, all the media outlets serve their audience with different social media pages, especially Facebook. According to the Spanish Association for Media Research in 2016, a total of 56.5 percent of Spanish Internet users used social networks to inform themselves which is 10.7 percent more than in 2013 (Bazaco et al., 2019). Additionally, numerous studies have found the involvement of social media nowadays in promoting clickbait headlines.

The term credibility is stated in many dimensions, including believability, reliability, accuracy, trust, objectivity, fairness, and so on. Credibility is defined in terms of perceptions of the media, characteristics of persuasive sources, message structure, and content. While no conclusive definition of credibility exists, most literature agrees that two key factors of credibility include expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland et al., 1953). As more people use the mass media as their main source of information, the media must maintain the credibility of what they present to the public (Lee, 1978). Here, credibility is equally important for the effectiveness of democratic processes such as the formation of public opinion, elections, and public diplomacy (Tsfati, 2003). Credibility as it relates to media has been broken into three distinct, but related areas: source credibility, message credibility, and medium credibility (Kioussis 2001). The credibility factor is very important in this era of social media as everyone now shares information on their profile first and later it becomes news on any mainstream media. It would be great to have any previous study on online news and credibility factors to examine Bangladesh's perspective to support this study. However, no such study has been found while a 2014 study on television news in Bangladesh and perceived credibility examined the theoretical and empirical relationship between market-oriented journalism and the credibility of television news.

As the practice of clickbait headlines is not a new one, there are several studies related to clickbait headlines and their impact on the audience in various dimensions across the world. Television news in Bangladesh: intersection of market-oriented journalism and perceived credibility; Social Media, Fake News, and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Sketching the Case of Southeast Asia; can fake headlines rescue journalism? The irrelevancy between headline and content in online journalism; these studies are found in Bangladesh and the South East Asian perspective which make the study more pertinent. Additionally, studies like clickbait as a strategy of viral journalism; clickbait and their effect on perceptions of journalistic credibility and quality; clickbait headlines and journalism credibility in Sub-Saharan Africa; relationships between clickbait headlines and trustworthiness; clickbait – trust and credibility of digital news; have been done so far in this field. In every study, clickbait is represented as a negative form of journalism. A trio of researchers from the University of Mississippi and the University of Oklahoma have analyzed 1.67 million Facebook posts that had been posted by a total of 153 media organizations. They developed a 'clickbait detection model', and tried to figure out whether mainstream media or unreliable media used clickbait more often (Murphy, 2018). The study stated that both mainstream and unreliable media use clickbait regularly and that it grew in prevalence between 2014 and 2016. A total of 19.46 percent of headlines were clickbait in 2014 while the number was 23.73 percent in 2015 and 25.27 percent in 2016 (Uddin Rony et al., 2017).

### **Research Question**

Aiming to find out the actual numbers or ratio of clickbait headlines used by these media, the reason behind the rise of clickbait headlines in the era of social media, and to disclose the Bangladeshi media personnel's perception of audiences' credibility, this paper particularly formulated some questions which include:

**RQ1.** What is the number of clickbait headlines on selected media's official Facebook page in a specific period?

**RQ2.** Why are mainstream media using clickbait headlines instead of conventional headlines?

**RQ3.** Is money the only factor that guides the media to use clickbait headlines?

**RQ4.** What do media personnel think about audiences' credibility following the rise of clickbait headlines?

### **Methodology and Sampling**

The qualitative method of research has been followed for the research. More specifically, the taxonomic qualitative method was used for conducting the study. Taxonomies are classified structures that organize elements into categories based on their relationships and similarities. Content published on the Facebook pages of the selected media has been scrutinized to examine the number of clickbait headlines. These large sets of data have been analyzed by using classification methods on similarities of the variables. In addition, several interviews with concerned media have been conducted to understand their intention of using clickbait headlines and their effects on audience credibility.

Content shared on social media platforms mainly on Facebook by four top-ranked mainstream media in Bangladesh has been analyzed first. According to the latest ranking on Alexa, the top four media outlets in Bangladesh include Prothom Alo, Jagonews24.com, Dhaka Post, and Bangla Tribune. Content of seven days shared on the Facebook pages of these four media has been analyzed through various aspects in terms of defining clickbait headlines. Following the analysis, several interviews were conducted to disclose the perception of media personnel about audiences' credibility. The interview also aimed to find out the media's agenda as well agenda or intention behind the rise of clickbait headlines in the era of social media. A total of 12 interviews of Editors, Head of News, News Editors, Head of Social Media, SEO Manager, Digital Marketing Manager, Social Media Executive, and Social Media Manager have been conducted on these four media (Table 1). These hour-long open-ended interviews were conducted both in-person and online. Few questions on content analysis were structured while the other questions were open-ended and the media personnel were free to share their perception on the issue. Three interviewees aimed to be anonymous, as a result, their names were not disclosed. The findings of the study have been mentioned following the summary of the key points of the interview about the research questions.

Table 1. Lists of Interviewees

SL	Name of the Interviewee	Designation	Organization
1	Mr. X	Head of Online	Prothom Alo
2	Asif Aziz	Additional News Editor	Jagonews24.com
3	Mohiuddin Sarker	Editor	Dhaka Post
4	Masood Kamal	Head of News	Bangla Tribune
5	Mehedi Hasan	Senior Moderator, SMI	Prothom Alo
6	Ayon	Senior Executive, Social Media	Jagonews24.com
7	Rejaur Rahman Russell	Manger, Digital Marketing	Dhaka Post
8	Md Shahinuzzaman	Manager, SEO	Bangla Tribune
9	Mr. Y	Moderator, SMI	Prothom Alo
10	Mr. Z	Social Media Executive	Jagonews24.com
11	Aminul Islam Roman	Social Media Executive	Dhaka Post
12	Emran Hossain	Social Media Manager	Bangla Tribune

### Data Representation

First of all, content analysis is performed on content shared on the Facebook platform by the top four mainstream media in Bangladesh. According to the latest ranking on Alexa, a tool that ranks websites based on the users' daily time on the site, page views per visitor, and traffic, four top-ranked mainstream media of Bangladesh have been selected for the study. These four media include Prothom Alo, Jagonews24.com, Dhaka Post, and Bangla Tribune. Content shared in a total of seven days from 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022 to 29<sup>th</sup> January 2022 on the official Facebook page of all these media have been analyzed based on some aspects. The first thing aimed to identify through the content analysis is to reveal the number of clickbait headlines used by the media. Some criteria have been fixed following the literature review to define a headline as a clickbait headline. These criteria are:

*Exaggeration:* Exaggeration can take different forms, such as the alteration of correlational statements into causal statements, change in explicitness and directness of included advice, or twisting of important experimental facts (Patro et al., 2018). Clickbait headlines are often modified to appear more negative than the actual article, exaggerate main points, or over-emphasize conflicts to attract more readers (Ecker et al., 2014). Most of the time, journalists exaggerate an incident and make some content having no relation between the headline and the body of the news.

*Sensational Word:* Sensational headlines are headlines that grip people's attention and generate reader interest. Conventional abstractive headline generation methods, unlike human writers, do not optimize for maximal reader attention (Xu et al., 2019). By using sensational and misleading headlines, especially on social media platforms, clickbait has the objective of attracting and determining online users to click on a given link to generate website traffic (Zhang and Clough, 2020). Journalists tactically place a sensational word in the headline which is irrelevant to the context. These sensational words have been used in the headlines to get more clicks.

*Celebrity Focused:* The term celebrity alludes to a person who is known to the general society for their accomplishments in zones other than that of the item



class supported. It can be for example an actor, an entertainer, a performer, a singer, a sports figure, and others (Friedman and Friedman, 1979). Several news stories have been published by the media having zero news value. Prioritizing the 'prominence' factor of the celebrity, hundreds of news have been published to get more clicks.

*Question Marked Headlines:* Question-based headlines are another type of clickbait headline designed to create uncertainty by posing a question about the information contained in a news story. Recent media headlines that are grammatically interrogative are perceived as confusing and less informative (Poole, 2021). Question-marked headlines consisting of WH-questions create inquisitiveness among the audience and that interest guides readers to click on the link to know what has been stated there.

*Quote Used as a Headline:* Journalists are using a new and unique form of quoting which not only reproduces the quote exactly but also offers substantial other levels of potentially newsworthy information such as the level of public support for the statement, the amount of debate it has stimulated, and the politician's photo (Dumitrescu and Ross, 2021). Clickbait headlines often use forward-referring expressions, reverse narrative, and hyperbolic language to arouse curiosity and entice the reader to click (Blom and Hansen, 2015). Journalists selected a catchy, funny, or awkward statement from an entire conversation to quote in the headline. Usage of the quotes as headlines is not a new thing, but today's media uses it as a weapon to get more clicks. Quotes are used in the headlines tactically to encourage the audience to click on the respective links.

Alongside this, another objective of content analysis is to keep a close eye on which bit, clickbait headlines are used most. These might be national, international, entertainment, sports, or anything else. The analysis aims to find out the ratio of using clickbait headlines in different bits. The final purpose of the analysis is to observe the audiences' reactions or comments on news with clickbait headlines on their Facebook page. This may help to get an idea on the ground of acceptance level from the audience.

## **Prothom Alo**

Since 1998, Prothom Alo has been one of the leading and largest circulated newspapers in Bangladesh. According to the National Media Survey 2018, Prothom Alo has more than 6.6 million daily readerships online. The online portal of Prothom Alo is the most visited Bangla website in the world, as per the Alexa Ranking. Around 17 million people follow Prothom Alo's official Facebook page alongside their websites and newspapers. The number indicates that the Facebook platform is a great source of readers for Prothom Alo. As a result, this media outlet designed and created content for the Facebook platform following some special strategies. They have some separate policies for making content for these social media platforms (Tables 2-4).

**Table 2.** To Find out the Total Daily Shared Contents on the Official Facebook Page of Prothom Alo and Examine the Number of Clickbait Headlines and Finally Get a Percentage of it

Date	Total Contents	Contents with Clickbait Headlines	Percentage
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	79	13	16.45%
24 <sup>th</sup> January	97	14	14.43%
25 <sup>th</sup> January	85	17	20.00%
26 <sup>th</sup> January	90	27	30.00%
27 <sup>th</sup> January	91	28	30.77%
28 <sup>th</sup> January	81	17	20.98%
29 <sup>th</sup> January	94	12	12.77%

**Table 3.** To Find out the Criteria of Clickbait Headlines, Prothom Alo Used on their Facebook Page to Grab the Attention of the Audience

Date	Clickbait Headlines				
	Exaggeration	Sensational Word	Celebrity Focused	Question Marked	Quote as Headline
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	1	1	3	8	0
24 <sup>th</sup> January	1	0	0	11	2
25 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	3	11	3
26 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	1	22	4
27 <sup>th</sup> January	1	0	3	22	2
28 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	2	14	1
29 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	0	11	1

**Table 4.** To Examine the Numbers of the Contents Specifically Each Bit Prothom Alo Uses Clickbait Headlines

Date	Clickbait Headlines					
	National	International	Entertainment	Sports	Lifestyle	Others
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	7	0	1	1	0	4
24 <sup>th</sup> January	6	2	2	2	1	1
25 <sup>th</sup> January	5	2	5	0	1	4
26 <sup>th</sup> January	8	3	5	0	3	8
27 <sup>th</sup> January	7	3	3	3	2	10
28 <sup>th</sup> January	3	2	5	0	3	4
29 <sup>th</sup> January	1	1	2	1	3	4

## Jagonews24

According to the Alexa Ranking, Jagonews24 is the second-ranked media outlet in Bangladesh. It is one of the most popular and reliable online news portals. Jagonews24 was launched in 2014 and since then it has become a great source of online news for Bangladeshi audiences. Alongside its position in the Alexa Ranking, Jagonews24 has over 4 million followers on its official Facebook page and this huge community is one of the most important factors for them to get connected with their audience (Tables 5-7).

**Table 5.** To Find out the Total Daily Shared Contents on the Official Facebook Page of Jagonews24 to Examine the Number of Clickbait Headlines and Finally Get a Percentage of it

Date	Total Contents	Contents with Clickbait Headlines	Percentage
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	259	18	6.95%
24 <sup>th</sup> January	260	18	6.92%
25 <sup>th</sup> January	272	15	5.51%
26 <sup>th</sup> January	255	11	4.31%
27 <sup>th</sup> January	247	13	5.26%
28 <sup>th</sup> January	219	12	5.48%
29 <sup>th</sup> January	244	12	4.92%

**Table 6.** To Find out the Criteria of Clickbait Headlines, Jagonews24 used on their Facebook Page to Grab the Attention of the Audience

Date	Clickbait Headlines				
	Exaggeration	Sensational Word	Celebrity Focused	Question Marked	Quote as Headline
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	0	0	1	16	1
24 <sup>th</sup> January	2	0	1	15	0
25 <sup>th</sup> January	1	0	1	13	0
26 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	3	8	0
27 <sup>th</sup> January	0	1	2	9	1
28 <sup>th</sup> January	3	0	1	8	0
29 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	1	9	2

**Table 7.** To Examine the Numbers of the Contents Specifically Each Bit Jagonews24 uses Clickbait Headlines

Date	Clickbait Headlines					
	National	International	Entertainment	Sports	Lifestyle	Others
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	1	3	6	1	3	4
24 <sup>th</sup> January	3	0	5	1	4	5
25 <sup>th</sup> January	2	2	1	0	3	7
26 <sup>th</sup> January	2	1	4	0	2	2
27 <sup>th</sup> January	3	1	3	1	1	4
28 <sup>th</sup> January	1	0	6	0	0	5
29 <sup>th</sup> January	2	2	3	0	1	4

## Dhaka Post

Dhaka Post is comparatively new among all the media outlets selected for the study as it started in 2021. It has gained tremendous success in attracting audiences and has become one of the most popular online news portals in Bangladesh within a very short time. As per the Alexa Ranking, Dhaka Post ranked in three. Dhaka Post has nearly 3 million followers on its official Facebook page. As a result, the Facebook page became the most important weapon for Dhaka Post to grab more audience (Tables 8-10).

**Table 8.** To Find out the Total Daily Shared Contents on the Official Facebook Page of Dhaka Post to Examine the Number of Clickbait Headlines and Finally Get a Percentage of it

Date	Total Contents	Contents with Clickbait Headlines	Percentage
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	214	18	8.42%
24 <sup>th</sup> January	213	10	4.69%
25 <sup>th</sup> January	228	15	6.56%
26 <sup>th</sup> January	220	11	5.00%
27 <sup>th</sup> January	205	7	3.41%
28 <sup>th</sup> January	178	10	5.62%
29 <sup>th</sup> January	183	10	5.46%

**Table 9.** To Find out the Criteria of Clickbait Headlines, Dhaka Post used on their Facebook Page to Grab the Attention of the Audience

Date	Clickbait Headlines				
	Exaggeration	Sensational Word	Celebrity Focused	Question Marked	Quote as Headline
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	1	0	2	12	3
24 <sup>th</sup> January	3	1	2	4	0
25 <sup>th</sup> January	4	0	0	11	0
26 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	1	10	0
27 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	2	5	0
28 <sup>th</sup> January	1	0	0	8	1
29 <sup>th</sup> January	0	1	0	8	1

**Table 10.** To Examine the Numbers of the Contents Specifically each Bit Dhaka Post uses Clickbait Headlines

Date	Clickbait Headlines					
	National	International	Entertainment	Sports	Lifestyle	Others
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	2	0	8	2	2	4
24 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	6	1	2	1
25 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	5	4	2	4
26 <sup>th</sup> January	0	1	4	2	2	2
27 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	3	1	2	1
28 <sup>th</sup> January	0	1	6	0	1	2
29 <sup>th</sup> January	2	0	2	1	2	3

## Bangla Tribune

Bangla Tribune has been one of the most popular and reliable online news portals for so long among all the Bangladeshi portals. Bangla Tribune started its journey in 2014 and throughout the time after launching, it became a very popular and credible source of online news and content for the Bangladeshi audience. According to the Alexa Ranking, it is ranked among the top four media outlets in Bangladesh. Bangla Tribune has a great number of followers on its official Facebook page. The number is nearly 4 million and it is one of the most important platforms for them to get connected with readers (Tables 11-13).

*Table 11.* To Find out the Total Daily Shared Contents on the Official Facebook Page of Bangla Tribune to Examine the Number of Clickbait Headlines and Finally get a Percentage of it

Date	Total Contents	Contents with Clickbait Headlines	Percentage
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	175	8	4.57%
24 <sup>th</sup> January	188	5	2.66%
25 <sup>th</sup> January	175	8	4.57%
26 <sup>th</sup> January	160	12	7.5%
27 <sup>th</sup> January	166	16	9.64%
28 <sup>th</sup> January	149	9	6.04%
29 <sup>th</sup> January	152	6	3.95%

*Table 12.* To Find out the Criteria of Clickbait Headlines, Bangla Tribune used its Facebook Page to Grab the Attention of the Audience

Date	Clickbait Headlines				
	Exaggeration	Sensational Word	Celebrity Focused	Question Marked	Quote as Headline
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	0	0	0	8	0
24 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	0	5	0
25 <sup>th</sup> January	0	1	1	5	1
26 <sup>th</sup> January	0	1	1	6	4
27 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	2	11	3
28 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	2	7	0
29 <sup>th</sup> January	0	0	0	6	0

*Table 13.* To Examine the Numbers of the Contents Specifically each Bit Bangla Tribune uses Clickbait Headlines

Date	Clickbait Headlines					
	National	International	Entertainment	Sports	Lifestyle	Others
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	4	0	1	1	2	0
24 <sup>th</sup> January	2	0	0	1	0	2
25 <sup>th</sup> January	1	1	2	2	1	1
26 <sup>th</sup> January	5	0	2	2	2	1
27 <sup>th</sup> January	4	2	2	3	3	2
28 <sup>th</sup> January	2	1	3	2	1	0
29 <sup>th</sup> January	2	0	1	2	1	0

## Research Findings

**RF1:** In response to the first research question for the study, the final number or percentage of clickbait headlines in these four media's Facebook pages during this period is given in Table 14.

Table 14. To Highlight the Overall Ratio of Clickbait Headlines by the Media in that Period

Media	Total Contents	Clickbait Contents	Overall Percentage
Prothom Alo	617	128	20.75%
JagoNews24	1756	99	5.63%
Dhaka Post	1441	81	5.62%
Bangla Tribune	1165	64	5.49%

### Prothom Alo

The analysis revealed that Prothom Alo shared some classified content on their Facebook page instead of sharing all the content published on that day. The media outlet shared content considering the demand of the audience on the social media platforms. The clickbait headline content percentage on Prothom Alo's Facebook page indicated how the journalists of the media lure the audiences with clickbait headlines. Especially, Prothom Alo prioritizes sharing content having clickbait headlines instead of content having conventional headlines on social media platforms. Prothom Alo mostly focused on question-marked headlines as over 80 percent of the clickbait headlines had this component during this period. Most of its question-marked headlines consist of how, when, where, what, which, and different queries. The practice of using question sign (?) in the headlines has become very common in Prothom Alo. Alongside the question-marked headlines, celebrity-focused content and quotes as a headline are also used in greater numbers. Prothom Alo shared a series of content regarding Bangladeshi actress Pori Moni's wedding and Indian actress Katrina Kaif's honeymoon during this time. It shared a huge number of content regarding the Bangladesh Film Artistes' Association election with catchy, funny, or awkward quotes in the headlines. However, the presence of other criteria like exaggeration and sensational words in headlines is comparatively little in Prothom Alo's shared content on the Facebook platform.

### JagoNews24

The analysis of Facebook content over seven days revealed that JagoNews24 shared almost all of its content published in a day on the Facebook page. Jago News has no particular designed content to share on the Facebook platform like Prothom Alo. As JagoNews24 shared all of its published content on Facebook, the percentage of clickbait content is lower for the media compared to the previous one. JagoNews24 mostly used question-marked headlines among the study's criteria of clickbait headlines. In that period of 7 days, around 80 percent of JagoNews24's clickbait content is designed with question-marked headlines. Like Prothom Alo, they tried to create curiosity among the audiences with the practice of using question sign (?) in the headlines. The analysis exposed that JagoNews24 picked religious, travel, lifestyle, and entertainment-based content for making question-marked headlines. The practice of exaggeration in the headlines has been found in the contents shared by JagoNews24. They picked entertainment and trendy issues to exaggerate in the headlines to attract more audiences. However,

the tendency to use sensational words in the headlines is comparatively low in number by JagoNews24. It also maintained a balance while creating celebrity-focused content. Though JagoNews24 always went for trendy issues, the presence of catchy, funny, or awkward quotes in the headline is not huge in numbers. Events like Bangladeshi actress Pori Moni's wedding, Indian actress Katrina Kaif's honeymoon, and Bangladesh Film Artistes' Association election have also been highlighted vastly by Jago News like Prothom Alo. They picked these events as an opportunity to grab more audiences. They exaggerated these events to entice the audience to click on its contents. The presence of clickbait headlines has been found in every bit of JagoNews24, including national, international, entertainment, sports, lifestyle, and other sections. However, most of the clickbait content of JagoNews24 on its Facebook page has been found in the entertainment and lifestyle section.

### **Dhaka Post**

The analysis revealed that Dhaka Post shared all of its content published in a day on its Facebook page. It doesn't have any specifically designed content to share on the Facebook page like JagoNews24. Dhaka Post mostly focused on question-marked headlines as around 80 percent of the clickbait headlines used by Dhaka Post had the component. This media intended to create inquisitiveness among the audiences with these headlines. Most of Dhaka Post's question-marked headlines are based on lifestyle and entertainment content. The exaggeration factor in headlines has got priority in Dhaka Post's content on the Facebook platform. The numbers of celebrity-focused content and quotes as headlines are comparatively less in Dhaka Post's content. However, Dhaka Post shared several contents related to Bangladeshi actress Pori Moni's wedding and Indian actress Katrina Kaif's honeymoon in that period. Like Prothom Alo, Dhaka Post shared numerous contents regarding the Bangladesh Film Artistes' Association election. All of their content regarding the election is relevant but they used catchy, funny, or awkward statements by the artists or candidates of the election to quote in the headline. The presence of clickbait headlines has been found in Dhaka Post's every bit while entertainment got the highest priority.

### **Bangla Tribune**

The analysis revealed that Bangla Tribune shared all of its content published in a day on Facebook. Like JagoNews24 and Dhaka Post, Bangla Tribune doesn't have any specifically designed content to share on Facebook. Bangla Tribune mostly focused on question-marked headlines among the criteria of clickbait headlines. In that period of analysis, around 90 percent of Bangla Tribune's clickbait content is designed with question-marked headlines. Bangla Tribune picked the banking sector, Islamic banking, bank interest, and economic and business content for making question-marked headlines. The exaggeration in the headlines was not found in Bangla Tribune's content and it refrained from using sensational words in the headlines as well. Alongside the question-marked

headlines, celebrity-focused content and using quotes as a headline are two other dominant criteria found in Bangla Tribune's content. The presence of clickbait headlines has been found in national, entertainment, sports, and lifestyle bits.

**RF2:** One of the major purposes of the study is to find out the reason behind the rise of clickbait headlines in the era of social media. Instead of conventional headlines, the media used clickbait headlines more in recent times, especially in social media. Several interviews with the media personnel from the selected media for the study revealed some key factors behind the rise of clickbait headlines. These reasons include:

**Technical Advancement:** The first and foremost target of every media is to claim the top-listed position in the Google search engine. The top position in Google search has been determined considering various factors, including search, page view individual readers' presence on the site, and so on. Clickbait headlines helped to get more clicks and visits on the website which is very much efficient in raising the page views of the website. More clicks will place the media at the top of the Google search which helps them to get more advertisements. Click generates the traffic, revenue, and advertisement impression of the media.

**Financial Advancement:** The media started the practice of clickbait headlines as more clicks means more money. Almost all the media are looking for profit with clickbait content. It is very difficult to get clicks and audience engagement with the conventional practice of journalism. There are several media outlets across the country and new media outlets are launching regularly. In these circumstances, all the media shared the same content on the social media platform at the same time. Clickbait headlines are the easiest way to tempt the audience to click on the content.

**News considered a 'Commodity':** Nowadays news is considered a 'commodity'. Like other business products, the main target of all the media is to sell their news to the respective readers. As more sales means more profit, the clickbait headlines have risen in recent times. In the era of social media, news is like the product for every media outlet and the media are the business organization. Every business organization aims to generate profit by selling their product, the media outlets are not an exception here in this context. By hook or by crook, the media tried to sell their product. This concept of selling news is also responsible for the rise of clickbait headlines.

**Positive Clickbait:** Media developed a concept that it takes no time to get the attention of the audience with clickbait components in the headlines. This is vastly responsible for the rise of clickbait headlines. According to media outlets, clickbait headlines are used in positive manners which are taken as a part of the marketing strategy. As a result, media outlets use clickbait components on important news sectors, including national, international, and politics. They termed this as 'positive clickbait'. As engagement is the prime concern for media outlets, they positively practice clickbait headlines to get more audience.



**RF3:** Following the interviews with the media personnel, the author identified that money is not the lone factor that guided the media outlets practicing so many clickbait headlines in the era of social media. The study revealed that excluding money, few things guided the media to use clickbait headlines. These things are:

**Competition:** In this current era of social media, competition to reach more audiences in a shorter time is the main motive of the media. Every media served the same information at a time. With the help of social media platforms like Facebook, it became available in the feed of every user's device within a very short time. To compete with others, media served content with clickbait components to differentiate content from others. To win the competition of attracting more audiences to click, the information has been exaggerated with sensational words or phrases in the headlines. Media's competition with each other to sell more news encouraged the practice of using clickbait headlines.

**To grab the attention of more readers:** Media are looking for more readers to get more clicks on their links. As a result, they designed clickbait content to engage all sorts of audiences. They provide a variety of news angles on certain information. According to different media personnel, readers decide in just 3 seconds what to read or not. So, the media have to provide something to grab the readers' attention in these three seconds. Three seconds is a very short time and when the media designed content considering the attention span of the audience, the presence of clickbait components is very much expected in the content's headline.

**Audience Demand:** The main intention of every media is to serve the audience with different types of content. All the information, news, and content of the media are designed following the audiences' demands and interests. As per the media personnel, the audience mostly liked clickbait content instead of conventional or quality content. The likes, comments, shares, and engagement of clickbait content on social media platforms are far more than the conventional content. As the media are always looking for more engagement by the audience, they designed clickbait content as well as headlines.

**Creating Brand Value:** Media considered the practice of clickbait headlines as an establishment of their identity. They tried to introduce something unique for a simple event and kept the practice in progress as a branding of the individual organization. The concept of creating a separate brand is true for every media, according to their representatives. Everybody wants to deliver something in a unique way to attract the audience. To prove oneself different from others, the clickbait headlines have been used.

**RF4:** The study revealed that Bangladeshi media personnel are cognizant of the fall of audiences' credibility following the rise of clickbait headlines in the era of social media. The interview with the representatives of these media outlets indicated that sensational headlines and incomplete news have some negative effects on various dimensions including audience credibility. The media personnel admitted that by generating 'clickbait' content, media got additional traffic and financial value by creating an audience base on their social media platforms. According to media personnel, it is possible to create a sensation and get some

instant readers with sensational and clickbait content. As a result, the media prioritized clickbait headlines for quick sensation which destroyed the acceptability of the media among the audience in the long run. The media personnel blamed clickbait headlines for the fall of audience credibility and mentioned that no media can sustain for long with the continuous practice of clickbait and sensational headlines. If the readers don't get the information for which they clicked, the acceptance level of the portal will be decreased. Media that are only dependent on these sensational and clickbait headlines have no everlasting readers or followers due to the lack of trustworthiness. However, they acknowledged that making additional traffic and financial value should not be the only goal of a media as media has some specific role to play for society.

### **Additional Findings & Discussion**

Apart from the research question-based findings, a few additional findings have amplified the strength of the study. This study summarizes the entire findings of the interviews which came up with some unique and significant discoveries.

**AF1:** *Media don't have any specific agenda behind the rise of clickbait headlines in recent times.* Media personnel claimed that there is neither any specific agenda nor any religious or political desire behind the rise of clickbait headlines, though all the media across the world have some specific agenda to serve while addressing or establishing something new.

**AF2:** *The Media took the 'negative news value' into consideration while publishing reports regarding some film celebrities of Bangladesh.* According to the journalists, many of the film industry celebrities have negative news values. As people are interested in their news, media are bound to share their stories. To keep pace with the situation, they are promoting some celebrities by using the term 'negative news value' which enlarges the number of celebrity-focused content.

**AF3:** *The Social Media department of every media is under huge pressure to increase the readers and page views at any cost.* Whatever the scenario is, they have to maintain a real-time visitor to the website. As a result, they used sensational and irrelevant words in the caption to create hype among the audiences. They are not thinking about the long-term consequences, they are just doing their job to lure mass people to click on their link.

**AF4:** *The belief or trust of audiences in media is at death's door following the rise of clickbait headlines.* The social media followers of these media outlets deliberately expressed their anger and frustration over the media for this type of trickery. The comment section of these media's Facebook pages indicates the audiences' disbelief over media due to such process of being directed by an alluring headline and then encountering unrelated content. However, the media personnel don't agree to take the social media comments seriously. According to their perception, most of the social media comments are motivated, unorganized, and unconstructed.

The study discovered the ‘culture of fear’ among the media personnel which guided the rise of clickbait headlines. The world is mostly ruled by autocratic governments and in this region, there is no such environment for practicing good forms of journalism. The pressure from the government, owners, and advertisers keeps the journalists away from good practice of journalism. There is no such environment for doing an investigative report against any corrupt government officials or powerful political leaders. The number of journalist harassment, detentions, and deaths is increasing gradually and it established a ‘culture of fear’ in society. The Digital Security Act 2018 is another impediment for journalists which abstained them from doing serious reporting. As media personnel are facing impediments in doing investigative or in-depth reporting on a large scale, they keep themselves busy with the poor form of journalism. And they depend more on clickbait headlines for the overall earning of their media outlet as well. In this context, the ‘culture of fear’ existing in society is also tremendously responsible for the rise of clickbait headlines.

### **Conclusion**

The study comes up with a surprising finding that the most popular and top-ranked media in Bangladesh secured the top position in terms of using clickbait headlines on social media platforms in a specific timeline. The availability of clickbait components is found in every media selected for the study. Interestingly, the representatives of these media are cognizant of the situation and they have some preparation for the last stage of losing audiences’ credibility. Media have an intention to balance the situation by serving both clickbait and objective content at the last stage of losing audience credibility. Though the ‘culture of fear’ among the media personnel keeps them abstained from the quality practice of journalism, the media should be concerned about regaining their credibility. Media personnel stated that it is quite possible to grab the attention of the audience and earn the expected financial value with proper practice of journalism and standard headlines but it takes time. This will be a time-consuming process, but the media will get an everlasting audience through such practice. The audiences’ comments on social media platforms indicated that the belief or trust of audiences in media is at death’s door. Social media comments could never be an index to measure the audiences’ credibility, however, the media need to take into consideration this issue as well.

### **Recommendations & Areas of Future Study**

The rise of clickbait headlines in recent times is not a good indication for the journalism sector of Bangladesh. An alternative to clickbait headlines should have to be introduced to keep the flow of income alive. Additionally, the importance of good practice in journalism has to be presented positively. New incentives and awards should be introduced that make the journalists confident in doing

investigative or in-depth reporting. When most of the media concentrate on the good practice of journalism, poor practices like clickbait headlines will be decreased automatically. Most importantly, the environment for good practice of journalism has to be ensured for the journalists. The pressure from the government, owners, and advertisers has to be reduced. The freedom of the press has to be ensured.

This study doesn't conduct any survey or interview of the audiences to know their perceptions. All of their reactions are being measured by previous studies. However, direct interaction with the audience would provide a better understanding of their trustworthiness in media. Further study would be focused on examining the condition of credibility of the audience through direct interaction. Besides, interesting facts may be revealed upon further study as to why readers demand clickbait-oriented content instead of standard content.

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