

(RE)VISITING PRIVATE TELEVISION RESEARCH IN BANGLADESH: CALL FOR NEW RESEARCH AGENDA IN NEWS MEDIA STUDY

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Abstract

Private television is the most popular mass media in Bangladesh with a vast audience of both news and programs. However, research on private television and its news media has not advanced sufficiently. Analysing available research on different databases this study identifies general trends in Bangladesh's private television and its news media research which shows that in addition to low volume of research, most of the study focused on some common aspects resulting in many significant areas unexamined. Finally, this article suggests new agendas in news media research with particular focus on the role of the state, ownership and news labour—three key stakeholders of the private television news media. This investigation will contribute to the scholars and industry insiders to identify the gap in private television research, especially in relation to the news media, and take necessary initiatives.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Private television, Research, News media, New agenda, Suggestions

Introduction

Private television experienced an enormous growth in Bangladesh during the last two decades. Currently, 80 percent people watch news and programs on 35 channels (Azad, 2018). However, information about private television and its news media is critically insufficient due to sparse number of research; neither academia nor the industry has shown sufficient interest in this regard. Consequently, along with low volume, research is mostly focused on a few common themes like: power, politics and media, market-media relationship, public sphere, and media and development.

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As a result, many crucial aspects remain unexamined. Moreover, vaguely all the research employed few common approaches and techniques. This investigation analysed the status of private television research and locates important gaps in news media study. In suggesting new agenda in news media research, this article primarily relied upon news and reports about different stakeholders of the industry, including the state, ownership and journalists, published on newspapers and organisational proceedings. This article first offers an overview of Bangladesh's private television industry, then discusses the status of overall private television research with a particular focus on the news media, and finally suggests a rationale for a critical research framework in private television news media study.

Private Television Industry in Bangladesh

Private television started operation in 1997 with the establishment of the channel ATN Bangla. It was an outcome of massive socio-economic and political transformation in both national and global contexts (Atiqur Rahman & Alam, 2013). The fact is, since the 1990s, Bangladesh's media industry has been experiencing steady growth. Though not forensically examined, currently, it enjoys 10-12 percent annual growth (Ghosh, 2016) where television posits at the top. Now, 35 private television channels broadcast news and programs for around 140 million local viewers and a small number of expatriate Bangladeshi. Cable operators facilitate the content supply chain for a monthly fee of BDT 300 (US\$ 4) each subscription. Although owning television was a luxury until the mid of 1990s confining its uses mostly among urban middle and upper class members, currently 74.2 percent urban and 43.9 percent rural households own a television set (BBS, 2019; Rahman, 2009). It is a common household commodity with approximately US\$ 414.22 million market size ("Consumer Electronics Industries," 2018). Thus, television is no longer a luxury, rather an essential household commodity.

Also, , private television is a lucrative business sector. For the last two decades both the business class and power elites are keen to own television stations considering it profit-generating as well as opinion-mobiliser resulting politicians and business magnates the television owners mostly (Anis Rahman, 2020). Market price of leading television houses like Ntv, ATN Bangla or Channel i was, at least, ten times higher than initial investment in the mid of the last decade (Atiqur Rahman, 2017). However, the heyday seems declining with the abolition of eight television channels' monopoly in 2010, and recently many stations are not making a profit likely (Azad, 2018).

Television channels' only earning source is advertising as they are free-to-air (FTA). Though the size of advertisement market is a matter of debate, television's

dominance on market is above question (Azad, 2018). However, unplanned growth of the industry comparing to the ad market has created severe competition. Between the year 2005 and 2018, the number of station increased five times while the advertisement market could not flourish correspondingly. Moreover, recently television stations are facing stiff competition due to the expansion of social media as the business class is showing growing inclination to these platforms for advertising their products.

In addition to audience, investment and advertisement market, industry's labour force has experienced considerable growth with approximately 50,000 workers in different capacities (Hossain, 2017). Significantly, the labour size was minimal in the early years of the industry due to the cautious investment policy of the channels. For example, ATN Bangla and Channel i started operation with 10-20 staff though rapid success encouraged them drastically expanding the labour size within a year (Snigdha, 2001). Now each station maintains around 400-800 staff thanks to 20 Media Studies schools in public and private universities for steady labour supply. Thus, all aspects of private television have experienced significant growth transforming it from infant industry to the most vibrant area of Bangladesh's mediascape.

Private television News media

The expansion of private television accelerated the growth of its news media accordingly. Although early private television channels were entertainment-only, the advent of the third channel, ETV, introduced news also. Since 2000, all the channels started news broadcasting which earned immense popularity. In 2001, news bulletins received highest audience rating while drama serials were in second position (Snigdha, 2001). Considering growing demand for news, the first 24/7 news channel—CSB— started operation in 2007 paving way for another seven in the following years. Besides news channels, most stations offer three news bulletins daily. As a result, news labour holds a significant share of the industry's staff composition which was 8,000 in the year. The fact is, until 2010, private television was very lucrative to the news media workers though the perception changed recently due to professional hazards like wage suspension, job curtail, government censorship, and similar. Moreover, partisan practice of some journalists further curtailed the professional autonomy of the entire community. In short, with the industry's growth, news media also expanded along with few negative features.

(Re)Visiting Private Television Research

Studying television is a newer phenomenon in Bangladesh. Although the Mass Communication and Journalism school of Dhaka University used to conduct some research as part of BA and MA curriculum, most studies were content analysis of state-owned television programs with limited diversity in scope, objective and method, and remained unpublished. Despite many media studies schools being established recently, even with exclusive focus on Television (e.g., Department of Television, Film & Photography at the Dhaka University), researching television and its news media has not advanced correspondingly. As a result, although the first available research on television is dated 2004 (Huda, 2004), the second research is after five years with specific focus on private television (Rahman, 2009). However, it is gaining popularity and getting published though the volume is low.

In investigating the status of private television research, we examined available double-blind peer-reviewed articles, book chapters and PhD dissertations on three databases: Google Scholar, ProQuest and Scopus. Although the first research on private television was dated in 2009, study period of this project is from the year of the industry's inception—1997 to 2021. Our investigation emphasised on themes and approaches of the research works, volume and authorship patterns. Finding shows research mostly conducted applying the broader critical studies approach, including political economy and cultural studies, and liberal pluralist perspective, and employed either qualitative or quantitative techniques; authors are mainly media academics and focused on themes like *power, politics and media, market-media relationship* and *media and development* as explained hereunder.

Relationship between power, politics and private television is a popular topic among local media scholars. Anis Rahman (2012, 2020), Atiqur Rahman (2017), Khan (2013, 2020), Mamun (2012) and Shoemsmith et al. (2013) are the pioneers of this tradition. Influenced by the Critical School, especially the political economy school, these scholars rigorously investigated governmental influence on television ownership, its historical roots, and beneficiaries of the process. They argue that taking advantage of a crony capitalistic system, since inception, only the confidants of the ruling regimes earned television licenses (Khan, 2013; 2020). In this relation, Atiqur Rahman (2017) observed that post-1990 economic changes and numerous policy initiatives generously contributed to the growth of this owners class while Shoemsmith et al. (2013) identified the root of contemporary state interference in early Bangladesh's media policy that furthered by the subsequent regimes.

In addition, Anis Rahman (2020) observed that formal and informal governmental influence on license allocation is standard since the industry's inception resulting in a business-politics nexus where the owners are the prime beneficiaries. Democracy deficit and a lack of political struggle of the industry insiders have intensified this nexus. Moreover, authoritarian attitude of the incumbents further constrained the pluralistic capacity of the medium. In another work, Anis Rahman et al. (2017) argued that the Bangladesh's broadcast policy is so government-biased that it offered absolute power to the Prime Minister and Information Minister concerning the private television sector. In short, researchers are agreed that every regime want to control private television for own purposes.

Apart from examining the governmental influence, some researchers investigated cultural implications of television. Mamun (2012) observed that some drama serials are designed to foster Islamic ideology. Employing semiotics and critical discourse analysis, he contextualised the growth of such pro-Islamic entertainment and its relationship with the public discourse. He argues that fictionalised representation of Islam on television drama is not coincidental, it is rather planned to instil a new type of authority among the viewers concerning religion and nationhood. Therefore, the portrayal of Islam on television drama is an explicit Islamic cultural activism that actively promotes the 'Bengali Muslim' identity.

Market-media relationship is another popular research theme. Divided into two streams, this tradition either criticised the market-inclination of television programs and its adverse effect, while the other advocated for the market expansion role of private television and its contribution in economy. For example, employing a critical political economy approach, Atiqur Rahman and Alam (2013) explained the interrelation between international money flow, global media market, and the growth of local private television. They observed that the rapid growth of private television was an outcome of the market economy policy which satiated the advertising demand of private corporations and entertainment thirst of middle class viewers. In this line Atiqur Rahman (2017) further observes that advertising dependence, profiteering tendency and promotion of consumerism are the salient features of the private television industry. In contrast, business school researchers are equally sympathetic to pro-market nature of television content considering its consumption-friendly role beneficial for national development. One such research by Nekmahmud and Rahman (2016) argued that audience mostly supports commodity advertisements. Similarly, Haq (2010) claimed that television channels significantly promote consumption-related cognition, attitude and values among local teenagers. Applying quantitative techniques, both the research concludes that television has beneficial impact on Bangladeshi consumer market.

Media and development theme is also enjoying growing popularity. Researchers of this tradition mostly focused on television's role in economic and human development. One research of this kind shows how agricultural programs on television contribute to sustainable growth (Islam, 2019). On the other hand, researchers like Haque (2013) investigated women representation on television soaps where she explained how mega serials aid women in addressing patriarchy. Employing representation and feminist lens, she observed that although many forms of stereotyping and patriarchy are common in soaps, they frequently address controversial and complex social issues like gender or migration so simplistically that helps to tackle patriarchy. Despite being contrary to the dominant feminist view, she (Haque, 2013) argued that as these soaps are women-centric in both content and character, it helps women to subvert patriarchy. Moreover, women do not watch soaps only to avert reality, they rather actively read and develop strategies to challenge patriarchy. Within the broader *media and development*, the issues of children are also getting focus. One such research from human development aspect examined children's participation in both public and private television programs (Reza & Haque, 2021). The study observed that although children are enthusiastic to join programs in different capacities, stations do not sufficiently include them due to funding shortage; also, children cannot play role in program planning or content development.

Thus, the number and diversity in private television research is critically insufficient. The following discussion is on private television news media research.

Private television news media research: Insufficient and a lack of diversity

Similar to the other aspects of private television, its news media research has also not been flourished sufficiently. Although the first investigation on Bangladeshi private television was news media focused (Anis Rahman, 2009), research has not satisfactorily advanced in the following years. Need to mention here that news programme was the most popular production of the industry in the early years (Snigdha, 2001) and still claims a significant audience size. However, research on private television news media is critically low and limited within the themes like *market-news relationship*, *politics-news relationship*, *public sphere* and *audience perspective* that employed a common set of approaches and techniques as discussed below.

The first research on private television as well as its news media is on *market-news relationship* by Anis Rahman (2009) focusing the impact of market liberalisation

policy on news. Employing a political economy approach, it explained how the market liberalisation policy and the advertisers' as well as owners' interests influence the news production process. The author argued that because of free market policy, television channels often follow unethical means in profit maximisation and promote a consumerist culture depriving the audience of necessary information. He (Anis Rahman, 2017) further examined the growing market-oriented journalism trend in television channels. For the author, although television had better scope comparing to the newspaper in creating a platform for public debate, it failed because of homogenisation, urban-centricity and commoditisation of news caused by political and business influence. Consequently, market-driven and urban-centric discourses, unnecessary treatment on chosen politicians, shrinking journalistic freedom and depoliticization of the audience characterised private television news. Moreover, a politico-commercial nexus controls private television news resulting in the massive 'exclusion' of the publics. In short, both the works are overly critical about market influence on television news.

A few research have focused *politics-news relationship*. Employing the propaganda model, Ahmed and Osmani (2014) showed how the news bulletins of both state-owned and private television are influenced by ownership and the ruling party's interests. Applying quantitative content analysis it showed the state-owned television do not offer any coverage to the opposition party while the private television coverage is also insufficient. On the other hand, following a political communication approach, Chowdhury (2015) showed how protocol-value determines television channels' news treatment policy. Examining three 24/7 news channels, he showed television stations offer undue treatment on politics, set political parties' agenda, offer much focus on two big political parties, repeats few common events, and avoid in-depth analysis of political issues. In a similar work, Islam (2016) investigated the coverage bias of the local channels. Applying content analysis method, the author showed television channels give much importance to the power lobby, especially the ruling party dignitaries.

Public sphere role of private television has also been examined by some researchers where they offered contrasting views concerning the influence of the state and market on news. For example, according to Anis Rahman (2012), although the television sector has experienced significant quantitative growth, it could not aptly accommodate a democratic public sphere due to the absence of diversified reporting, insufficient participation of stakeholders and severe market influence. However, disagreeing with this view, Shafi and Genilo (2013) observed that proposition like governmental and business influence restrict private television's public sphere role

is not well substantiated; moreover, professional excellence enables media workers overcoming business pressure; also, it is practically impossible for politicians and owners interfering in each content. They further advocated that instead of being dogmatic about Habermasian public sphere model, scholars should develop new one compatible with Bangladesh society. Agreeing with this argument, Roy (2020) observes that in the context of existing unfriendly newsroom culture, yet television channels play a new form of public sphere role which he identified as localised public sphere. Employing a combination of media studies and cultural studies lens, the author shows audiences' local context does not necessarily follow the media effect or culture industry doctrine; rather, their local context, ideology and self-understanding mutually guide viewing habit and meaning-making task. Thus, Bangladeshi private television news media still perform a public sphere role even in an unsatisfactory democratic condition.

A few research has been conducted from the *audience perspective* also. One such study by Andaleeb et al. (2012) identified a list of credibility determining factors in Bangladesh context; these are: freedom of the station, channel's commitment to the audience, perceived objectivity, source expertise and audio-visual quality. In another work, Andaleeb (2014) showed that although the viewers do not consider television news independent, they are satisfied with objectivity level; they understand that considering the waning press freedom in the country, journalists usually try to ensure objectivity. The study further observed that under a hip of soft news public issues frequently disappear from the screen. Therefore, in another work, Andaleeb and Rahman (2015) suggested sufficient focus on public journalism to improve the credibility of news and audience' critical ability.

The only book size research on private television is also about news and its audience. Conducted by Roy (2021), this ethnographic research investigated private television news from *audience perspective* that dealt with versatile issues like news viewing habit in both rural and urban Bangladesh, audience' many-form responses to the news, the impact of rumours and fake news, contestations and contradictions of journalists within and outside the newsroom, and similar aspects. Significantly, instead of employing media studies approach, this ethnographic study examined the audience from sociological and anthropological perspectives which is uncommon in local media research.

In short, research on private television and its news media is seriously low, limited within a few subject areas, and conducted mainly by the media academics employing a common set of research tools. The fact is that approximately 14

articles, six book chapters, four unpublished PhD dissertations, and a book cannot aptly explain Bangladesh's most dominant medium's 25-year-long journey (Table 1). Absence of infrastructure is one important reason behind this untoward reality. To tell the truth, promoting research in the public sector has long been denied in Bangladesh (Jasim, 2021). As a result, research on different subject areas, including media and television has not flourished. Consequently, many crucial aspects of television remain unexamined. For example, there is no research from a broader industrial perspective accommodating different investment aspects other than the much-discussed business-politics nexus, or television channels' business strategies and audience management techniques in the context of growing competition from the overseas channels and the social media, or the issues of media labour. Moreover, the industry's operational pattern during the first decade remains largely unexamined though this formation stage immensely impacted the functional nature in the following years.

Table 1: Frequency, publication type, and authorship pattern in private television research

Year	Title of Study	Type of Publication	Pattern of Authorship
1997-2008	XXX	XXX	XXX
2009	A political economy of the emerging television news industry in Bangladesh	Journal Article	Media Studies Academics
2010	Role of reality TV as a consumer socialisation agent of teenagers in a developing country	Unpublished PhD dissertation	Business Studies Academics
2012	Television and public sphere in Bangladesh: An uneasy relationship	Journal Article	Media Studies Academics
2012	Text and the context: Locating explicitly religious TV serials in Bangladesh	Journal Article	Media Studies Academics
2012	Credibility of TV news in a developing country: The case of Bangladesh	Journal Article	Media & Business Studies Academics
2013	State, capital and media in the age of globalisation: An inquiry into the rapid growth of private TV channels of Bangladesh	Journal Article	Media Studies Academics

2013	Television, discursive spaces, and the public sphere of Bangladesh	Book Chapter	Media Studies Academics
2013	A political history of television in Bangladesh	Book Chapter	Media Studies Academics
2013	Women in Bangladeshi soap operas: Myth or reality?	Book Chapter	Media Studies Academics
2013	Private television ownership in Bangladesh: A critical qualitative inquiry	Unpublished PhD Dissertation	Media Studies Academics
2014	News coverage and treatment in prime-time bulletins: A comparative study on BTV and ATN Bangla	Journal Article	Media Studies Academics
2014	Audience perceptions of objectivity and independence of TV news in Bangladesh	Journal Article	Business Studies Academics
2015	Television news in Bangladesh: Intersection of market-oriented journalism and perceived credibility	Journal Article	Media & Business Studies Academics
2015	Portrayal of political news in Bangladeshi television channels	Journal Article	Media Studies Academics
2016	Coverage bias of Bangladesh television media: A portrayal of power and politics	Journal Article	Media Studies Academics
2016	Audience attitude toward satellite TV program and advertising in Bangladesh	Journal Article	Business Studies Academics
2017	Television journalism, market-orientation, and media democratisation in Bangladesh	Unpublished PhD Dissertation	Media Studies Academics
2017	Political economy of private television channels in Bangladesh: A critique	Journal Article	Media Studies Academics
2017	The politico-commercial nexus and the broadcast policy reform in Bangladesh	Book Chapter	Media Studies Academics

2019	Perception of farmers on the impact of television programme in sustainable agricultural development of Bangladesh: A case study on Hridoye Mati O Manush	Unpublished PhD Dissertation	Media Studies Academics
2020	Emergence of a 'new public sphere' in Bangladesh: The interactive dynamics between news television, citizens and the state	Journal Article	Media Studies Academics
2020	The politico-commercial nexus and its implications for television industries in Bangladesh and South Asia	Journal Article	Media Studies Academics
2020	Political economy of the relationship between crony capitalism and the private television channel boom in Bangladesh	Book Chapter	Media Studies Academics
2021	Revisiting children's participation in television: Implications for digital rights in Bangladesh	Book Chapter	Media & International Studies Academics
2021	Television in Bangladesh: News and Audiences	Book	Media Studies Academics

Furthermore, researchers mostly relied on a common set of approaches and techniques. For example, in researching *power, politics and media* most scholars followed critical political economy approach; or, in relation to *media and development* theme, only the positivists' views are available. As a result, the manifold-dimensions of any given issue/event is largely ignored or partially examined. Similar observation is applicable concerning data gathering and analysis techniques. Although combining different approaches and techniques can offer a comprehensive view, it is mostly absent in existing works. Moreover, lack of industry insiders' and non-governmental organisations' participation made television research chiefly media academics-reliant whose performance is also constrained by many factors (Ullah, 2015). Severe reliance on media academics also restricted the advancement of a multi-disciplinary approach in research. Although biographical works and commentary of the industry insiders could have brought some differences in this regard, lack of scientific procedures and objectivity hindered this likelihood.

On the other hand, researching private television with specific focus on news media has rarely received exclusive focus. It is mostly studied within the broader realm of entire television news media where state-owned television's news media

also included. In addition, the aim and scope of all the research is limited to a few subject areas employing a common set of data collection and analysis techniques. These factors mutually resulted in leaving many crucial aspects of private television news media unexamined. Consequently, a comprehensive picture is still absent. Therefore, the following section discusses different issues of private television news media as reported on newspapers, magazines and organisational reports, but failed to catch researchers' attention.

Call for New Agenda in News Media Research

Despite being news the most popular television content, the manifold dimensions of news media have largely been overlooked by Bangladeshi researchers. For example, various roles of different stakeholders in news production, including the state, owner or labour, have rarely received researchers' attention. Moreover, in the changing mediascape, especially with the exponential growth of social media, challenges of private television news have not investigated. Also, the issues of audience perception about television news have long been neglected. However, although researchers have missed, these aspects frequently appeared on news articles and organisational reports.

For example, concerning the state's influence, researchers (e.g. Anis Rahman, 2017, 2022; Atiqur Rahman, 2017; Khan, 2013, 2020) mainly focused on ownership control, but various constitutional and regulatory constraints and a variety of censorship is a matter of worry to the journalists. Employing different media laws and licensing clauses, ruling regimes occasionally close down television channels for circulating unpleasant news. Channels like ETV, CSB, Diganta and Islamic Television were closed on account of violating license procurement provisions, though the hidden reason was anti-government reporting ("Diganta, Islamic TV," 2013). In relation to constitutional control, important to mention here that instead of repealing repressive laws, each regime incorporated further stringent provisions. For example, the notorious Digital Security Act 2018 has included more ruthless clauses compared to similar kind of Information and Communication Technology Act 2006. Moreover, many legal jargons are insufficiently defined which restricts the scope of the news media. For instance, concerning the Digital Security Act 2018, rights organisation like Article 19 (2019, p. 2) observes, "in particular, several definitions contained in the Digital Security Act 2018 are too vague and overbroad".

Also, many forms of covert and overt censorship are predominant. For instance, during pandemic the Information Ministry formed monitoring committee to

resist ‘propaganda’ on private television news (“Monitoring Media: Info,” 2020). In 2015, a popular talk-show on Banglavisision channel, Frontline, was suspended under governmental pressure (Galhotra, 2015). Furthermore, prior to 11th parliamentary election, the government ‘advised’ television channels not to invite discussants critical to the government (Sultan, 2018). Recently, owners and other industry stakeholders frequently complain about wiretapping, digital interception and governmental ‘advice’ (Azad, 2018). Moreover, government officials occasionally ask journalists to appear before inquiry committee which is a clear sign of intimidation (“DMP summons goes,” 2020). Furthermore, cautioning television channels is standard for long been. In 2009, Banglavisision channel was warned for discussing ‘sensitive’ issues concerning the defence forces (Mohaiemen, 2013). In 2018, government cautioned Ekattor for covering anti-government rally identifying it ‘instigation to public disorder’ (“Ministry cautions Ekattor”, 2018).

Along with censorship, detaining and physical assault are also frequent. In 2015, police detained the ETV owner as the channel aired an exiled opposition leader’s speech (Galhotra, 2015). In addition, on numerous occasions, government arrested, assaulted and abducted television journalists. During past two decades 19 journalists were killed, 25 imprisoned and one was abducted (CPJ, 2020). International journalist unions repeatedly urged the government to stop all forms of physical, administrative and judicial attacks on the news workers, though it is continuing (“Open letter to,” 2020). Thus, apart from controlling through license allocation, media reports show many forms of regulatory domination and censorship are standard in private television news industry, though these remain unexamined.

On the other hand, concerning the business strategy of news media, scholars mostly focused on growing advertisement-inclination of television channels and business’s influence on the news (Anis Rahman, 2009; Atiqur Rahman, 2017). However, there are many more things that demand extensive investigation. Even the reasons and patterns of advertisement-inclination or business influence have rarely been investigated. The point is, for some industry insiders, television channels never had a sustainable business model other than relying on the advertisement (“Why Bangladeshi TV,” 2019). News report shows taking advantage of FTA nature of the stations, cable operators fetch all the profits from content supply making television’s news media critically dependent on advertisement (Hassan, 2019). Moreover, various corrupt techniques of some stations in pursuing commercials including that of Television Rating Point manipulation have never been researched (Amin, 2016).

Not only the above-mentioned aspects of advertising, many other business practices of television stations have also not been researched. For example, television stations occasionally seek governmental support in pursuing profit. News report shows sometimes government offered many direct or indirect supports to the stations including tax rebate (“Pvt Tvs seek,” 2014), permission for controversial corporate branding (“Supreme court: No”, 2020) and restrictions on local advertisers in advertising on overseas media (“‘Media Unity’ formed”, 2016). The point is, does the government offer these supports altruistically? Bangladesh’s declining press freedom status does not reflect so (RSF, 2021). Moreover, there are many examples of governmental interference on media organisations’ advertisement flow for circulating critical reports (Hasan, 2011).

It is to be mentioned that along with advertisers’ pressure and the state’s influence, many aspects of ownership critically impact channels’ editorial policy. For some media professionals, governmental interference is not the only reason behind the absence of investigative news (“Anusandhani sangbadikota: Badha,” 2016). Television stations frequently avoid in-depth reporting as their owners are not in a moral position to allow critical reporting. Many of them are indicted for misconducts like illegal earning (“Bangladesh Bank removes,” 2015), money laundering (“Desh TV’r parichalak”, 2020), land grabbing (“Falu soho sat”, 2019), forgery (“2 Jamuna group”, 2016), tax dodging (“Dhaka-Shanghai Ceramics”, 2015) and similar offences. However, the impact of television owners’ unlawful activities on news production has never been investigated.

Researchers also overlooked some other trends of the industry’s business strategies. Media reports indicate that many television stations are not making a direct profit (Azad, 2018), but still, television channels are coming to the market, including 24/7 news channels. Although it appears like business magnates invest altruistically, it is not the whole fact. Some news articles suggest businesspersons indirectly make profit from television channels (Chowdhury, 2019). Moreover, they often employ journalists to pursue different agendas. For example, during the parliamentary election of 2018, Jamuna channel and its associate media institutions commissioned many news workers to campaign for the owner (“Jugantor, Jamuna TV”, 2018). Thus, owners have different purposes concerning television business which remains unexamined.

Apart from many aspects of regulatory control, censorship or business strategies, issues of news media labour largely overlooked. Labour exploitations like wage curtail (Broadcast Journalist Centre ([BJC], 2019), lack of job security

(“Kormokhetrer onischoyotar provab”, 2019) or extreme labour unrest in the industry (BILS, 2019) were reported on many occasions. In addition, various governmental interference on journalists is as old as the industry. For instance, in 2002, the government forced the managing director of ETV to resign and leave the country (Hossain, 2002); recently, numbers of reporters were detained for reporting against the power lobby (“UN: Stand with”, 2021). However, most of these issues remained unnoticed by the researchers. The fact is that the condition of television news labour, especially the causes and effects of unsatisfactory labour conditions, has never been studied.

On the other hand, many television journalists’ integrity and ethical understanding are under question. For example, some journalists are accused of maintaining an undue relationship with corrupt personalities and owning illegal businesses (“Goyenda najardarite besh,” 2019) and suspicious transactions (“Bangladesh agency opens”, 2020). Media report also shows the industry is not free from sexual harassment, even leading television journalists are accused of sexual violence (“ETV chief reporter,” 2019). Moreover, personal rivalry and political partisanship of a section of journalists have reached a critical stage in recent years (“Kushtia-e sangbadik Jafar,” 2018). According to media reports, some journalists are so loyal to the incumbent that they even try to prove fellow journalists disrespectful to the government and the law and order system as well (“Bangladesh detains journalist,” 2017). However, this kind of partisan practice of the journalists is largely unresearched.

Conclusion

Thus, it can be argued that many vital aspects of Bangladeshi private television news media are still unexamined making the sector unfathomable and limiting its optimum growth in turn. Experience of different countries suggests that the role of key stakeholders like the state, ownership and labour critically impacts private television news production and circulation process, their failure affects the public sphere role of news media and degrades credibility to the audience. Though, a handful of research offered some pictures of disappointing role as discussed earlier, but the magnitude, causes and impacts are not adequately investigated though these were reported on news articles and different organisational reports. Therefore, this article suggests the researchers to set new agenda in private television news media research concerning the three key aspects of the industry—state-media relationship patterns, business strategies of television channels and news labour—with optimum focus on before-mentioned gaps, and audience perception about possible impacts

of these aspects. It also suggests that instead of chiefly relying on media studies academics, researchers from diverse backgrounds, including the industry, need to participate in news media research. Moreover, along with employing dominant approaches like political economy and political communication or tools like document analysis, interview or survey, researchers should consider approaches like journalism studies, sociological approach, feminist studies or postcolonial studies to bring diversity in news media study.

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