

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA RUMORS IN SOCIAL UNREST OF BANGLADESH

Dr. Tania Rahman
Institute of Social Welfare and Research
University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh
Email: taniarahman39@gmail.com

Israt Jahan
Institute of Social Welfare and Research
University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh
Email: isratjahansw@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the number of rumors in Bangladesh has been accelerated e.g., rumors on the use of human head on Padma Bridge, sudden salt price hike, Chele Dhora (Baby kidnaper) for numerous purposes using social media like Facebook that has adversely been affecting country's socio-political environment. The overall objective of the study was to know about the role of social media rumors in the occurrence of social unrest in Bangladesh, and people's awareness about the safeguard's measures including Information and Communication Act (ICT Act). Students from one University and three colleges were chosen purposively for the study. Mixed-method approach was followed for collection of data from 138 respondents with the combination of male (107) and female (31) from 14 to 26 years of age groups who were considered as the main consumer of social media and most aware of social issues. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to each of the respondents and in-depth interviews were conducted for collection of quantitative data. Results showed that the most of the respondents (99.2%) considered the social media as a powerful medium of spreading rumors but majority of them (76.8%) were reluctant to take actions against the occurred rumor that easily make them to fall prey to social anarchy and remain in gruesome conditions. The study also indicated that 58.7 percent of the total respondents did not know about the ICT Act. Majority of male (49.2%) and relatively fewer female (9.2%) respondents were affected by rumors mostly from the age group: 14 to 25 years. The study recommends that awareness should be raised on ICT law and proper use of social media as youth are mostly affected by rumors. The findings would be an important guideline to the policymakers/government officials, NGO managers, and development practitioners for further study.

Key words: Rumor, Social Media, ICT Act, Social Unrest.

INTRODUCTION

Social media which facilitates quick electronic communication is a part of computer based electronic technology that enables us to share ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks among communities and individuals. It helps to share content includes personal information, documents, Videos and photos via computer, smartphone, web-based software or web application. In reality, social media-originated as a way to communicate with friends, families and relatives but later it was adopted by businesses to reach out to their customers (Dollarhide). Social media sites are widely being used as an instrument for gathering information; for example, societal issues (Lazer et al., 2009) and used for getting information on updated development from ongoing issues (Swit Phuvipadawat and Tsuyoshi Murata, 2010). Social media provides thousands of effective social networking platforms like (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter) with an internet connected device to share people thoughts and updated events. In Bangladesh, 30 million people are using social media and it also reported that 18 percent of the total populations are active in social media, whereas around 94 percent of the social media users enter the social networking sites (Social media users 30 million in Bangladesh: Report, 2018). Many unscrupulous cycle and conspiracy team try to disseminate rumors and provides misinterpretation of authentic information through social media to create social unrest. Some recent rumors were being spread through Facebook to destroy the social harmony in Bangladesh for instance: 'Children's head will be needed for Padma Bridge', 'Nuisance of child-lifting', 'power connection is being cut off', and 'Salt price hike' (Be Careful Rumor-mongers, 2019).

Pendleton, S.c (1998) reported, a rumor has to be involved with a statement whose accuracy is not justified or confirmed. Knapp, (1944) identified some key characteristics of rumors are transmitted by word of mouth; "information" about a "person, happening or condition"; and "the emotional needs of the community" (Knapp, 1944). Traditionally rumor spreads by word of mouth, but with the increasing use of the internet rumor propagation got new dimension (Kostka et al.). Social media provides easy access for everyone to share or post any information without systematic process which leads to spread misinformation (Procter et al., 2013) (Webb et al., 2016). Updates of news portals are often released piecemeal which may create rumors due to lack of verification (Silverman, Lies, Damn Lies, and Viral Content, 2015). Unfortunately, news organizations disclose unverified information and online rumors which misinterpret the true information (Silverman, Lies, Damn Lies, and Viral Content, 2015).

Several violent clashes occurred based on fake news in Bangladesh which spread through Facebook. Those incidents triggered tragic deaths and severe injuries. For instance, clash which claimed four lives happened between protesters and police with a rumor spread by an extremist Hindu man on Facebook defaming Prophet Muhammad. Another rumor spread by ill-motivated people on Facebook which claimed that Padma bridge needs human heads for construction work which triggered a panic that child-kidnappers are collecting heads of children. As a result, several people were beaten to death by agitated people on suspicion of child kidnapper (Rafe, 2019) .

Some published studies on the role of social media rumors are very limited. Few studies discovered several aspects in this area. Rumor related issues have been discussed from various perspectives (Donovan, 2007). Allport and Postman (Gordon W. Allport, Leo Postman, 1946) (Allport, G. W., & Postman, L, 1947) cited that people's reaction on rumors have been difficult to analyze and emphasized that "newsworthy events are likely to breed rumors". This study motivated him to set a question that: "Can rumors be scientifically understood and controlled?" (Gordon W. Allport, Leo Postman, 1946). The study revealed the significance of an official announcement from concerned authority regarding authentic information. (Takayasu et al., 2015) has conducted a research with case study and revealed important outcomes of rumors in the society. There is no study on social unrest caused from rumors in social media.

Little attention has been given to the area of rumors in social media in Bangladesh. However, some studies explored the characteristics of rumors based on the three aspects of diffusion of rumors: temporal, structural, and linguistic (Kwon, Sejeong et al.); some designs, ideas for reducing the spread of health-related rumors in a Twitter-like environment (Ozturk, Pinar et al., 2015); digital disinformation, the nature of contemporary digital communalism and violence on religious minorities in Bangladesh (Zaman, 2019). In our study, we have explored the common features of rumors, discovered the impact of social media rumors in social unrest of Bangladesh and the measures to prevent rumors in social media.

This study was conducted with the objectives to investigate the role of social media rumors in the behind social unrests in Bangladesh, and to assess users' awareness about the safety measures including Information and Communication Act (ICT Act). In these objectives, the common features of rumors in Bangladesh, the impact of rumors in social media and the ways to prevent rumors in social media were investigated. The main research questions tried to answer were 'What is the role of rumors in Bangladesh?' and 'What are the ways to prevent rumors in social media?' A mixed method approach through Face to face interview with semi-structured questionnaire and in-depth interview with guideline were followed and data collected from 138 respondents analyzed using the SPSS (version 25.0).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

In general, the term 'social media' is a technology-based media that facilitates communication, sharing of information, ideas, events, career interest and expression via social networks (Kietzmann et al., 2011). In the mid-2000s, researchers defined social media as social networks or social networking services (Boyd, D., & Ellison, N., 2007). The term social media refers to social networks which have emerged in recent years with the internet like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp. One scientific literature defined "Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of Users Generated Content" (Kaplan, A.M., Haenlein, M, 2010). One researcher reported that approximately 600 million users registered on Facebook and spending on this site rather than Google (Ray, 2010). Twitter, Facebook or any kind of social networking platform are great source of sharing information but lack of proper supervision which make this fragile ground for misinformation or rumor (Sardar Hamidian and Mona T Diab). Not only rumors but also facts are prevalent on social media (Anat Gesser-Edelsburg, Yaffa Shir-Raz, 2019) (Hardey, 'E-health': the internet and the transformation of patients into consumers and producers of health knowledge, 2001). Rumors can disseminate misinformation and disinformation on social media as their veracity is not justified (Anat Gesser-Edelsburg, Yaffa Shir-Raz, 2019). Rumor mongers try to create social unrest by spreading fake and fabricated news via social media is rising threat to the stability of the Bangladesh. Rumor mongers from diverse strata including teachers, students, businessman, journalist and human rights activists are getting involved to proliferate fake information sharing on social media. For instance, the quota reform movement and another incident happened with a female student of Kobi Sufia kamal Hall of Dhaka university, whereas some group of people posted fake information on social media which destroyed the fabric of the society (Zaman, 2018)

Rumor is one kind of social communication that plays an important role in different aspects of human affairs (Rumor Spread in Social Network). In psychology a rumor has some key features like it is usually believable, associated with important news and broadly spread without verification (Allport G. W. and Postman L, 1947) (KNAPP, 1944). A study revealed that personal discernment and negative mentality are the crucial as well as direct factor of rumor transformation as well as social factors like the low trust between members of the community and the group polarization have extreme negative effects on receiving the opinion of any specific group which leads to lack of confidence have a relation with rumor transformation (Xiaoqian Zhu and Fengming Liu, 2017). A large amount of youth population (29.8 percent) in Bangladesh has no education, employment or training mentioned by Dr Fahmida Khatun in a 2018 article. Consequently, skilled people are hiring from neighboring country due to young people in the country do not have the right skill set for the emerging economy. As a result, this social phenomenon has increased stress, anxiety, insecurity among the youth which provoke them falling for rumor and spreading them intentionally or unintentionally (Hasan, 2019).

During emergency or crisis, it increases the thrust for information is normal. The lack of update information and ambiguous statement by the government and media at this moment may lead unnecessary public panic, depression, emotional tension and economic crisis etc. (Kenneth et al., 2003) (Thomas, 2007) (J.-H. Kim and G.-W. Bock, 2011) (Dechun Liu, Xi Chen, 2011). Rumors effects raise fear and suspicion among general people which can create social unrest in the country (Chen et al., 2015). In July 2020, three teachers accused for spreading rumors on Facebook against Education Minister Dipu Moni which created panic among people during pandemic situation in the country (Three Teachers Arrested in Chandpur for Spreading Rumours Against Dipu Moni, 2020). One boy was accused for spreading rumors which created social anarchy in the country as well as he published some misleading photos, videos and comments on the Facebook that deteriorated the government's reputation (24-year-old held in Narayanganj for "spreading rumours, 2020). In 2019, some media outlets reported that 350,000 people are affected by dengue which was completely false (DSCC mayor: Rumours Being Spread About Dengue, 2019). The term corona virus disease (covid-

19) is a disease which resulting from Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection. The virus posed a major health challenges over the world including Bangladesh. Concurrently, several rumors, misinformation, fake news, and hoaxes which were about the prevention and cure of the Covid-19 propagated on fake social media platforms (Samia Tasnim., 2020). Rumors are spreading rapidly in social media rather than authentic information from floating news sites which deteriorate the reliability balance of newsroom. Another rumor was promoted in the media of Nigeria was overdose consuming of Chloroquine (a drug used to cure malarial parasite) can use for treating covid19 (Busari S, Adebayo B., 2020). Rumors and misinformation related with prevent and treatment of corona virus disease created confusion among general people as well as frontline health workers and doctors who are fighting with recent pandemic situation faced many challenges for rumors. During pandemic situation police arrested a leader of Jubo League who accused for spreading rumors about coronavirus on social media (Coronavirus: Jubo League Leader Held for Spreading Rumour in Pabna, 2020). Hoaxes and misinformation about covid-19 are creating social stigma around the world and created complex situation for the people who are in home quarantine or social isolation (Tasnim et al., 2020)

Some social media sites are very popular in Bangladesh. During July 2019–July 2020, people used Facebook (91.16%), YouTube (5.58%), Pinterest (1.85%), LinkedIn (0.54%) and Twitter (0.52%) (Social Media Stats Bangladesh, July2019-July2020, n.d.). Similarly, the ratios of the age group of Facebook users in Bangladesh are 73% of 13-25 age, 20% of 26-34 age, 5% of 34-45 age (Shams, 2017). Social networking sites have now become a place of mockery, memes, bullies, criticism, gossips and rumors, which are creating social conflicts in the society (Shams, Social media trends usages in Bangladesh, 2017). Social media networks offer a better platform for communication and search of jobs (Nikolaou, 2014). Noticeably, teenagers, young and adult people have embraced social networking sites via cell phone, tablet, personal computer etc. to connect their friends, share information and showcase their social lives etc. (Mehmood, Saba & Taswir, Tarang, 2013). Recently cyberbullying has become a common issue for teenagers in social media which affect their mind. Open access in social media gives advantage to some group of people to hack other account and to share photos and videos by opening fake accounts that deploy the reputation of other people (Faruq et al., 2017).

From the previous research, the scholars primarily concentrate on the spreading of rumors, but they ignored the way of controlling the situation. The judgment of cyber-crime was taken into consideration in the penal code enacted in 1860. The Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT) of 2006 of Bangladesh amended in 2013 which is considered as an excellent move in the cyber law field and commercial disputes of Bangladesh (Rahman, 2019). Concern over misuse of section 57 newly imposed in ICT Act-2013 had been growing to journalists and civil society organization: TIB, BILIA, Ain-o-Salish Kendra (ASK), Article 19, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), Institute of Informatics and Development (IID). According to the ICT Act, offenders who publish electronically any material caused to worsen law and order or to hurt religious belief or prejudice the image of the state or person would be punished seven (07) years to (14) years which is non-bailable (Law) . Arrested people in cases filed under the ICT Act in Bangladesh were: Amar Desh acting editor Mahmudur Rahman, rights organization Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman, bloggers Asif Mohiuddin, Mashiur Rahman Biplob, Subrata Adhikari Shuvo and Rasel Parvez. So, recent moves under ICT Act show that concern over misusing ICT act is not baseless (ICT (Amendment) Act, 2013: Right to Information and Freedom of Expression under Threat, 2013).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Daley-Kendal (DK) model introduced by Daley and Kendal (DALEY, D. J. & KENDALL, D. G., 1965) and Maki-Thompson model (Maki, 1973) are used for the studies of rumor spreading. According to the Daley-Kendal model, a close and mixed population have been subdivided into three groups, for example, termed ignorant group who are ignorant of the rumor, spreader group who have heard and actively spread it, and stifler group who have heard and ceased to spread it. Spreaders infect other individual in the population with the rumor through pair-wise meetings. The individuals become spreaders. Rumors are propagated by the population through pair-wise contacts between spreaders and others in the population. When either one or both of those involved in the meeting that rumor is known, they stop spreading, but turn into stiflers (Nekovee, M. et al., 2017). Similarly, according to the Maki-Thompson model, rumor is spread by the contacts between spreaders and others in the population. Spreader becomes stifler only when spreaders contact another spreader (Nekovee, M. et al., 2017).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Bangladesh, almost thirty-six million people use social media in order to share information and their views. Social media is considered as source of information which influence public opinion. However, communal violence and casualties have been seen in different parts of Bangladesh due to the rumors spread in social media in order to destroy the social balance. In 2019, some unscrupulous people hacked an account and spread fabricated hate statements which results in four deaths and more injuries (Abdullah Alif and Mizanur Rahman, 2019).

In this study, the common features and impact of rumors, and the measures to prevent rumors in social media have been explored. The research objective is to explore the role of social media rumors in social unrest of Bangladesh and to discover the people's awareness about the preventive measures including Information and Communication Act (ICT Act) in Bangladesh. In our study, we explored that some social riots happened in Bangladesh as a result of rumors spread in social media which adversely affected the people of different professions and ages. The measures to prevent rumors in social media which have been found in this study would be a strong guideline for Bangladesh along with other countries all over the world.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY:

The principal research question was: What is the role of rumors in Bangladesh? And what are the ways to prevent rumors in social media?

The main objective of this study was to investigate the role of social media rumors in the occurrence of social unrest in Bangladesh, and people's awareness about the safeguards measures including Information and Communication Act (ICT Act).

Specific objectives of this study were to:

Explore the common features of rumors in Bangladesh

Discover the impact of rumors in social media

Find the ways to prevent rumors in social media

METHODOLOGY

STUDY AREA AND LOCATION

The study has been conducted in Shahbagh, Khilgaon and New Market area of Dhaka city in Bangladesh. Students from three colleges and one university have been chosen. Student from Dhaka College, Eden Mohila College, Abu Jar Giffari College and University of Dhaka have been selected for data collection.

RESEARCH APPROCH AND METHOD

A mixed method approach combination of qualitative and quantitative data was followed so that the quantitative analysis becomes more reliable with qualitative one. In-depth interview method for qualitative data collection and survey method for quantitative data collection were followed in this study.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

Face to face interview with semi-structured questionnaire was carried out for quantitative data collection in survey method, whereas, in-depth interview with guideline was followed for qualitative data gathering.

SAMPLING: RESPONDENTS AND THEIR PROFILE

Three colleges and one university were selected for data collection from 138 students consisting both male (107) and female (31) respondents. Respondents were chosen randomly and purposively from students. The age group of the respondents was 16 to 26 with age range: 12. The mean, median and mode of the ages of the respondents are 20. Eight in-depth interviews were conducted in this study. Respondents for in-depth interview were chosen from politicians, police department, journalists, researchers, religious leaders.

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Data gathered through semi-structured questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS (version 25.0) and analyzed using frequency and cross tabulation and frequency using multiple response. Besides, data found from in-depth interviews were transcribed and compiled with verbatim on the basis of thematic analysis. The findings were presented considering different themes.

ETHICAL ISSUES:

Respondents were informed about the objectives and confirmed data privacy that the data would be used only for research purpose and respondents' personal information would be kept confidentially. Before starting interview, verbal consent was endured from the respondents.

FINDINGS:

Most of the respondents use social media for three to four hours a day. Most of the users spread rumors unconsciously. Respondents (99.2%) consider the social media as a powerful medium in terms of spread rumors.

CHALLENGES IN DIFFERENT PROFESSIONS

Most of respondents (64.5%) think that students from fifteen to twenty-five years mostly suffer from rumors. Businessmen also face challenges, claimed by 21% of the respondents. People from different professions got affected in their own professions due to rumors.

CHALLENGES FOR STUDENTS

Respondents during in-depth interview opined that sometimes online news portals disseminate misinformation to reach a huge number of viewers which creates dilemmas on students. As a result, they suffer from mental stress. On the other hand, rumors on question leak hamper the psychology of students. Students become morally degraded when they fall prey to collect leaked question. Concurrently, it has a detrimental effect on entire population in the long term.

CHALLENGES IN BUSINESS

Businessmen face losses when consumers avoid any product due to rumors. Usually consumers vandalize the shops which sell the avoided products. Consequently, businessmen have to suffer for long due to huge financial loss.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Most of the respondents claimed that rumors are harmful in the context of socio-economic condition of Bangladesh, whereas, 33.3% of respondents consider the rumors as more harmful.

ECONOMIC COST OF RUMORS

Rumors hamper economy condition. One respondent said, agitated people attacked Hindu community and vandalized their valuables one due to a rumor. Government had to compensate the affected people in order to immediate relief from their sufferings. The financial support from government is considered as public fund which is generally collected from the whole population. As a result of such kind of attack renders a great economic loss which partially affects the whole economic condition.

RUMORS IN PANDEMIC: COVID-19

People are turning away from social responsibility due to rumors spread over Covid-19 infections. For example: people are not willing to bury the corona virus affected dead body, but, people are frequently visiting shopping malls. Concurrently, ill-motivated people spread rumors centering corona-affected patient. They isolate corona-affected one from the society even after being cured. Corona-affected people are being isolated from the society due to previous hostilities too.

RUMORS AS A DISORDER

Rumors are social, political, economic, and cultural disorders. As a pandemic overwhelms the society, rumors can engulf the society in the same way. During Corona pandemic (Covid-19), government and people distribute relief. But, distribution of relief went out of government's control. Rumors are basically responsible for this dismay although politicians and media were involved in spreading fake news.

LONG TERM SOCIAL PROBLEMS DUE TO RUMORS

PHOBIA

Rumors create phobia in the society in the long term. A rumor is common in our village society, during diarrhea or typhoid, patients are not allowed to drink water and it leaves the patients in a more vulnerable condition.

BARRIERS TO WOMEN DEVELOPMENT

Some insidious groups spread rumors about women education in different times. One respondent during in-depth interview said that educated women cannot be happy in their conjugal lives. Such kinds of rumors create long-term effects for women development or women empowerment in our society.

ICT ACT-2013

Only two respondents (1%) know everything about ICT law. But, most of the people (58.7%) listened about ICT law, but, do not know so much about it, whereas, 30.4% of the respondents do have any knowledge on ICT law. During in-depth interview, one respondent argued that the law also needs to be amended. ICT law is an anti-humanitarian, anti-social and anti-state law. People are not paying attention to it. ICT law is only to nurture those in power. What services have any ordinary person received under

the ICT Act? The ICT Act has been enacted so that journalist writing against the corruption of any minister or influential person can be insulted and handcuffed, etc.

VULNERABLE AGE GROUP IN RUMORS

People from the age group of 18 to 22 faced challenges by misinformation in social media. There is a correlation between age and spreading rumors. Due to lack of judgment, people from the age group 18 to 22 do not have so much judgmental attitude. They believe random information from social media due to lack of judgmental attitude. People aged 18 to 22 have so many friend circles which increase the chance of spreading rumors. Generally, they like to gossip on different issues and tend to engage on conflicts. So, they got affected more rather than other age groups.

RELUCTANCE TO KNOW

When users get any link of interesting headline of news, they share it without checking information contained in this link. Sometimes, they do justify the information or news source. They feel them much worthy and aged enough. As a result, they tend to be revolutionists or engage in any destructive efforts. But, sometimes they express immediate reactions on any issue positively or negatively.

APATHY TOWARDS LEGAL STEP

Most of the respondents (76.8%) did not take any legal step against rumors. But, only 22.2% of the respondents took legal step against rumors spread in social media. Most of the respondent said that people do not get any benefit from ICT law. A kind of apathy has been created between us due to culture of impunity. At the same time there is a crisis of confidence in the law and order system. One respondent opined that police extort bribes from both complainant and defendant. Concurrently, influenced by bribe, the police release the criminals. Another respondent said that, a lot of rumor mongers spread rumors against one person at a time. So, it is next to impossible for the victim to fight against the rumors. Sometimes, yellow journalism spreads rumors.

LACK OF INFORMATION

The table shows above that majority of the respondents (91.4%) opined that social media users spread rumors unconsciously due to lack of information, lack of idea on proper use of social media, and believing any information randomly found in social media. But, respondents (44.8%) also think that users spread rumors intentionally by fake Id, sending SMS, providing wrong information in order to get public support, sharing distorted images, videos and previous pictures, whereas, 30.2 percent opined that they spread rumors unintentionally spreading wrong information for fun. During in-depth interview, respondents opined that the main reason of rumors is lack of information. People do not get accurate information. People believe any information whatever they get in social media. Several users of social media cannot judge whatever to use and share due to ignorance. They cannot understand the effect of random share and leaving like or comment. Moreover, one party intentionally spreads rumors in the political arena to defeat another. But, opposition party sometimes spread rumors against incumbent party. From communal point of view, followers on any religion spread rumors to humiliate the supporters of any other religion.

RUMOR MONGERS

Regarding spreading rumors (table shows below), 77.9% of the respondents identified the politicians, 60.3% of the respondents detected the businessmen and 53.4% identified the foolish, unemployed and illiterate people as rumor mongers, whereas, 49.6% and 48.9% of the respondents found the students and youth users, and the beneficiary group as rumor mongers respectively. Respondents said during in-depth interview, general people do not like to get involved in political issues. People who do not use social media believe the news heard from others. They double whatever they hear in public and spread to others which create panic in the society. Consequently, politicians purposively use the panic in order to achieve their goals. Other respondents opined that some people spread rumors intentionally or unintentionally in order to highlight their position in the society. Whenever pandemic or diseases increase, anti-government sentiment increases. In this situation, the opposition party spread rumors in order to weaken the public support to the government. People from incumbent party hide their major crimes through spreading rumors in order to divert people's view. On the other hand, as many likes, subscribes in social media, the more the financial benefit. Person who gets more public views with a lot of likes or subscribes, they can earn money by their social media account. They spread rumors in order to get more likes and subscriptions. Most importantly, in religious assemblies (Wazes or Mahfils), speakers speak against other peers. They claim opponents as atheist in order to get a lot of followers.

Rumor Mongers					
			Gender of respondents		Total
			Male	Female	
which class of people spreads rumors ^s	Student and youth users spread rumor	Count	51	12	63
		% of Total	38.9%	9.2%	48.1%
	Beneficiary group spread rumor	Count	48	16	64
		% of Total	36.6%	12.2%	48.9%

Politicians users spread rumor	Count	82	20	102
	% of Total	62.6%	15.3%	77.9%
Businessmen users spread rumor	Count	61	18	79
	% of Total	46.6%	13.7%	60.3%
Religion users spread rumor	Count	44	13	57
	% of Total	33.6%	9.9%	43.5%
Foolish, unemployed and illiterate people spread rumors	Count	54	16	70
	% of Total	41.2%	12.2%	53.4%
Journalist spreads rumors	Count	3	0	3
	% of Total	2.3%	0.0%	2.3%
class_youth_Teenagers_7.9	Count	1	1	2
	% of Total	0.8%	0.8%	1.5%
class_Mentally_sick_people_7.10	Count	0	1	1
	% of Total	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%
Total	Count	101	30	131
	% of Total	77.1%	22.9%	100.0%
Percentages and totals are based on respondents.				
a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 0.				

EFFECT OF RUMORS ON USERS

People become affected by rumors in different ways for instance: wrong information spreads over the society, political environment becomes worst, harmony of daily life face adverse situation regarding education, food etc. One respondent said, he has wasted a lot of money. Another respondent mentioned that he was cheated and he felt mental distress. One respondent claimed that he faced security crisis and became confused.

SOCIAL ANARCHY

Based on the response regarding effect of rumors, people faced difficulties ensuring healthy life (66.4%), ensuring security (63%), and taking right decision (58.8%). Besides, people (55.5%) face price hike of different products in daily life; and social life becomes affected with different social unrest. Politicians and celebrities are the most sufferers with rumor hoax (52.9%). One respondent expressed that rumors cause personal disgrace. Respondents identified rumors on some important issues. For instance: rumors about lifestyle of celebrities, communal violence, question leak of public examinations, artificial food, claiming alive people as death: rumors spread out on social media on health condition of Hussain Mohammad Ershad and Obaidul Kader claiming them died, baby kidnaper, Padma Bridge needs children's head, salt price hike due to salt crisis, onion price hike, student murdered by policemen in student movements, violence to female students during quota movement in the university of Dhaka and rumor which claimed that Kader Molla was seen on the moon.

FOOD CRISIS DUE TO RUMORS

Rumor mongers create instability in commodity price through spreading rumors. One respondent opined that despite there was sufficient stock of onion and salt, some rumor mongers spread rumor on onion and salt crisis in Bangladesh. Consequently, a lot of people stumble upon onion and salt stocks.

HAMPERING SECURITY

Rumors create discordance, inequality, and crisis to social harmony. They create injustice in society for a long period of time. Rumors threaten to personal security. Without verification of information, when any specific group attack another group of people based on rumors, it disrupts social security. For instance: rumors were circulating that some female students were killed during 'Safe Road Movement'. Then their classmates jumped into the movement risking their lives.

DEFAMATION DUE TO RUMORS

Rumors hurt the dignity of celebrities. When online portals misrepresent a scene of movie or partially highlight a movie with juicy headlines, their honor is hurt. For instance: What Mithila did! What Tahsan did! Interestingly, several celebrities spread rumors to get popularity across the country.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT TO PREVENT RUMORS

With the dataset, majority of the respondents opined that government can prevent rumors through stern legal action. Respondents (85.6%) emphasized on increasing awareness and 82.4% respondents suggested to strict surveillance system. Respondents also suggested measures to prevent rumors. For example, cybercrime unit should be fortified; conducting seminar against rumors, not to share more information with unknown one, awareness through newspapers and mobile phone calls, to identify fake IDs, to stop

fake news portal, to ban fake website. One respondent said during in-depth interview, we need to create awareness among people about rumors effect. Only death penalty cannot stop rumors to be spread. The law may prevent some social disorder, but this is not always applicable. One respondent said that if a Bangladeshi staying in America spreads rumors, cannot be punished according to the ICT law of Bangladesh.

SAFETY MEASURES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Users should justify any information found in social media, most of the respondents opined. Social media users should not trust blindly and share any information without verification of valid source in social media, 64.4% and 70.3% of the respondents suggested respectively. Respondents suggested some safety measures for social media users such as: report unpleasant posts, to inform all users about identified rumors and protest against rumors.

PUNISHMENT FOR THE RUMOR MONGERS

Fine and jail is most preferable punishment according to most of the respondent. However, 25.8% opined to execute the accused rumor mongers, whereas, only one respondent suggested to send them to psychiatrist. Some suggested legal actions against rumor mongers are: Lifetime imprisonment, 5 to 10 years of imprisonment, financial and physical punishment, to ban the rumor mongers from social media and to insult publicly.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to investigate the role of social media rumors behind the social unrest in Bangladesh, and awareness among people about the safety measures including Information and Communication Act (ICT Act). A mixed method approach with In-depth interview method for qualitative research and survey method for quantitative approach were followed in this study. Covid-19 pandemic was major obstacle for the collection of data.

Rumor is one kind of social communication that plays an important role in different aspects of human affairs (Rumor Spread in Social Network).Rumor mongers use social media to spread misinformation and disinformation because people do not verify the veracity of the information (Anat Gesser-Edelsburg, Yaffa Shir-Raz, 2019). This is proved from this study findings that Rumor mongers use social media as a powerful medium in term of spread rumors. Sometimes users of social media share rumors unconsciously. For instance when they get any interesting link, they share on their social media page without checking information contained in this link.

Fake and fabricated news in social media create rumors which is responsible for social unrest in Bangladesh. Rumor can be spread by anyone like teachers, students, businessmen, journalists and human rights activists; it destroys the fabric of society. There happened some social anarchy in Bangladesh due to some rumors. For instance, the quota reform movement and another incident happened with a female student of Kobi Sufia kamal Hall of Dhaka university, whereas some group of people posted fake information on social media (Zaman, 2018). Our finding showed that 77.9% of the respondents identified the politicians, 60.3% of the respondents detected the businessmen and 53.4% identified the foolish, unemployed and illiterate people as rumor mongers, whereas, 49.6% and 48.9% of the respondents found the students and youth users, and the beneficiary group as rumor mongers respectively. Sometimes religious figures stigmatized different religious followers as an atheist, which is completely misinformation about them. Rumor can create phobia and vulnerable condition in the country.

Our study found that, that government can prevent rumors through stern legal action. Respondents (85.6%) emphasized on increasing awareness and 82.4% respondents suggested to strict surveillance system. For example, cybercrime unit should be fortified; conducting seminar against rumors, not to share more information with unknown one, awareness through newspapers and mobile phone calls, to identify fake IDs, to stop fake news portal, to ban fake website. This finding is similar with previous study (ICT (Amendment) Act, 2013: Right to Information and Freedom of Expression under Threat, 2013) which is considered as an admirable move in the cyber law field and commercial disputes.

Rumor spreaders should be more harshly punished. In China 2013, the judicial authorities announced that spread rumors on the internet might be punished as the crime of provoking problems, according to the Criminal Law. Penalties of rumor creators and spreaders must be proportional to the consequences of the falsehoods (Daily, 2017). In Dubai, the government said they have zero tolerance about rumor mongers in coronavirus pandemic situation as well as warning people of hefty fines if they engage with such kind of dangerous activities. According to a government statement agreed by local Egyptian media Ahram Online that imprisonment of up to five years and a good amount of fine around \$1,200 might be imposed for rumor mongers (As Dangerous As the Virus': Middle East Cracks Down on COVID-19 Rumor Mongers, 2020). In our study we got some similar findings about the punishment of rumor mongers. According to the respondents, fine and jail is most preferable punishment. However, 25.8% opined to execute the accused rumor mongers, whereas only one respondent said to send them to psychiatrist.

CONCLUSION

Our findings from a mixed method approach, the study presented all findings based on different themes. Findings showed that people who use social media are not aware of sharing information. They are prone to spread information without verifying the source of information. In these consequences, people are facing many challenges in their daily life such as feeling insecure, cannot

take right decision, social violence, mental hamper, financial loss and communal conflict. Findings also showed that in order to prevent rumors, awareness should be increased in using social media sites carefully, knowing the proper use of information, making people aware about the adverse effect of rumors. Government should fortify cybercrime unit, conducting seminar against rumors, identify all fake IDs and fake online news portals. We found that implementation of law may prevent some social disorder but in the long term it will fail to prevent rumors from the society. Users should verify any information in social media as well as they should take steps against rumor mongers. Awareness through different seminars, campaigns and social efforts can reduce rumors from the society.

Face to face interviews during data collection has been disrupted due to Covid-19. Most of the female respondents were unwilling to provide important information. Some politically influential persons refused to talk over rumors in social media. This study unfolds some interesting factors and useful findings on prevent rumors in social media and people's reaction towards those rumors. We intensely believe that the study results would be an important guideline for government officials, NGO managers as well as legal and development practitioners for better policy implication.

References

- Kostka et al. (n.d.). Word of Mouth: Rumor Dissemination in Social Networks. *springer*.
- Takayasu et al. (2015, April 1). Rumor Diffusion and Convergence During the 3.11 Earthquake: A Twitter Case Study. *Plos.org*.
- Tasnim et al. (2020, April 2). Impact of Rumors and Misinformation On COVID-19 In Social Media. *Preventive Medicine And Public Health*.
- 24-year-old held in Narayanganj for "spreading rumours. (2020, June 23). Retrieved from Daily Star: <https://www.thedailystar.net/24-year-old-held-in-narayanganj-spreading-rumours-1919269>
- Abdullah Alif and Mizanur Rahman. (2019, October 21). *Link between social media and communal violence*. Retrieved from Dhaka Tribune: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2019/10/21/link-between-social-media-and-communal-violence>
- Allport G. W. and Postman L. (1947). *The Psychology of Rumor*. google scholar (https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=The+psychology+of+rumor&author=G.+W.+Allport&author=L.+Postman&publication_year=1947& Retrieved from https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=The+psychology+of+rumor&author=G.+W.+Allport&author=L.+Postman&publication_year=1947&
- Anat Gesser-Edelsburg, Yaffa Shir-Raz. (2019). Risk Communication and Infectious Diseases in an Age of Digital Media. *As Dangerous As the Virus': Middle East Cracks Down on COVID-19 Rumor Mongers*. (2020, March 30). Retrieved from Arab News: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1649286/middle-east>
- Be Careful Rumor-mongers. (2019, July 29). Retrieved from Daily Bangladesh: <https://www.daily-bangladesh.com/english/Be-careful-rumor-mongers%C2%A026454>
- Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. (2007, October 1). Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 210–230.
- Busari S, Adebayo B. (2020). *Nigeria Records Chloroquine Poisoning After Trump Endorses It for Coronavirus Treatment*. Retrieved from CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/23/africa/chloroquine-trump-nigeria-intl/index.html>
- Chen et al. (2015, September). Why Students Share Misinformation on Social Media: Motivation, Gender, and Study-level Differences. *Elsevier*, 4(5), 583-592.
- Coronavirus: Jubo League Leader Held for Spreading Rumour in Pabna. (2020, March 31). Retrieved from Dhaka Tribune: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2020/03/31/coronavirus-jubo-league-leader-held-for-spreading-rumour-in-pabna>
- Daily, C. (2017, June 2). *Rumor Mongering Ought to Be More Harshly Punished*. Retrieved from China Daily.Com.Cn: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2017-06/02/content_29587558.htm
- DALEY, D. J. & KENDALL, D. G. (1965, March). Stochastic Rumours. *IMA Journal of Applied Mathematics*, 1(1), 42-55. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/imamat/1.1.42>
- Dechun Liu, Xi Chen. (2011). Rumor Propagation in Online Social Networks Like Twitter -- A Simulation Study. *2011 Third International Conference on Multimedia Information Networking and Security*, (pp. 278–282).
- Dollarhide, M. E. (n.d.). *Social Media Definition*. Retrieved from <http://billscomputerpot.com/menus/windows/SocialMedia.pdf>
- Donovan, P. (2007, February 1). How Idle is Idle Talk? One Hundred Years of Rumor Research. *SAGE*, 54(1), 59-82.
- DSCC mayor: Rumours Being Spread About Dengue. (2019, July 25). Retrieved from Dhaka Tribune: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2019/07/25/dscc-mayor-rumours-being-spread-about-dengue>
- Faruq et al. (2017). Impact of Social Networking Sites in Bangladesh: Few Possible Solutions. *I.J. Intelligent Systems and Applications*, 53-60. doi: 10.5815/ijisa.2017.04.06
- Gordon W. Allport, Leo Postman. (1946, January 1). An Analysis Of Rumor. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 10(4), 501–517.
- Hasan, M. T. (2019, July 26). Rumours and Mob Killings: What Are the Underlying Causes? *ICT (Amendment) Act, 2013: Right to Information and Freedom of Expression under Threat*. (2013, October 9). Retrieved from <http://www.askbd.org/ask/2013/10/09/ict-amendment-act-2013-information-freedom-expression-threat/>
- J.-H. Kim and G.-W. Bock. (2011). A study on the Factors Affecting the Behavior of Spreading Online Rumors: Focusing on the Rumor Recipient's Emotions. *Proceedings of the 15th Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems: Quality Research in Pacific, PACIS 2011, Australia*.
- Kaplan, A.M., Haenlein, M. (2010, January-February). Users of the World, Unite! The challenges and Opportunities of Social Media. *ELSEVIER*, 53, 59-68.
- Kenneth et al. (2003, March 15). *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and its Applications*. *Elsevier*, 320, 571-580.

- Kietzmann et al. (2011, May-June). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the Functional Building Blocks of Social Media. *ELSEVIER*, 54, 241-251.
- Knapp, R. H. (1944, January 1). "A Psychology of Rumor". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 8(1), 22-37. Retrieved from <https://wikivisually.com/wiki/Rumor>
- Kwon, Sejeong et al. (n.d.). Prominent Features of Rumor Propagation in Online Social Media. *2013 IEEE 13th International Conference on Data Mining*. IEEE. doi:10.1109/ICDM.2013.61
- Law. (n.d.). Retrieved from ICT Division: <https://ictd.gov.bd/site/view/law/%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%87%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%93-%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%A7%E0%A6%BF>
- Lazer et al. (2009). Life In The Network: The Coming Age Of Computational. *Science*, 323(5915), 721-723.
- Maki, D. P. (1973). *Mathematical Models and Applications, With Emphasis on the Social, Life, and Management Sciences*. Pearson College Div. Retrieved from <https://www.amazon.com/Mathematical-Applications-Emphasis-Management-Sciences/dp/0135616700>
- Mehmood, Saba & Taswir, Tarang. (2013, January). The Effects of Social Networking Sites on the Academic Performance of Students in College of Applied Sciences, Nizwa, Oman. *International Journal of Arts and Commerce*, 2, 111-125.
- Nekovee, M. et al. (2017, January 15). Theory of rumour spreading in complex social networks. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and its Applications*, 374(1), 457-470. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physa.2006.07.017>
- Nikolaou, I. (2014, June). Social Networking Web Sites in Job Search. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 22, 179-189. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsa.12067>
- Ozturk, Pinar et al. (2015). Combating Rumor Spread on Social Media: The Effectiveness of Refutation and Warning. *2015 48th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. IEEE. doi:10.1109/HICSS.2015.288
- Procter et al. (2013, april 3). Reading the Riots on Twitter: Methodological Innovation for the Analysis of Big Data. *International Journal Of Social Research And Methodology*, 16, 197-214.
- Rafe, R. (2019, November 1). *Bangladesh: Fake News on Facebook Fuels Communal Violence*. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/bangladesh-fake-news-on-facebook-fuels-communal-violence/a-51083787>
- Rahman, T. (2019, october 20). *Online Law / Internet Law in Bangladesh | ICT Act Rules, Regulations & Rights | A Complete Overview*. Retrieved from [https://tahmidurrahman.com/cyber-law-of-bangladesh-internet-law-web-ict-act-rules-regulations-punishment-and-rights-in-bangladesh/#:~:text=In%20Bangladesh%](https://tahmidurrahman.com/cyber-law-of-bangladesh-internet-law-web-ict-act-rules-regulations-punishment-and-rights-in-bangladesh/#:~:text=In%20Bangladesh%20)
- Ray, A. (2010, november 26). : *The Implications Of Consumers Spending More Time With Facebook Than*. Retrieved from Forrester Blogs,: http://blogs.forrester.com/augie_ray/Rumor_Spread_in_Social_Network. (n.d.). Retrieved from WIKIPEDIA: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rumor_spread_in_social_network
- Samia Tasnim,. (2020, April 2). Impact of Rumors or Misinformation on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) in. *Preventive Medicine and Public Health*, 53(3), 171-174.
- Sardar Hamidian and Mona T Diab. (n.d.). *Rumor Identification and Belief Investigation on Twitter*. Retrieved from <https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/W16-0403.pdf>
- Shams, S. R. (2017, February 2). Social media trends usages in Bangladesh. Retrieved from <https://dailyasianage.com/news/46958/social-media-trends-usages-in-bangladesh>
- Silverman, C. (2015, february 10). *Lies, Damn Lies, and Viral Content*. Retrieved from https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/craig_silverman_lies_damn_lies_viral_content.php
- Social Media Stats Bangladesh, July2019-July2020*. (n.d.). Retrieved from statcounterGlobalStats: <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/bangladesh>
- Social media users 30 million in Bangladesh: Report*. (2018, march 23). Retrieved from <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/sci-tech/social-media-users-30-million-in-bangladesh-report-1521797895>
- Swit Phuvipadawat and Tsuyoshi Murata. (2010). Breaking News Detection and Tracking in Twitter. *2010 IEEE/WIC/ACM International Conference on Web Intelligence and Intelligent Agent Technology*. IEEE.
- Thomas, S. A. (2007, september 25). Lies, Damn Lies, And Rumors: AN Analysis OF Collective Efficacy, Rumors, and Fear In The Wake Of Katrina. *Sociological Spectrum*, 27(6), 679-703.
- Three Teachers Arrested in Chandpur for Spreading Rumours Against Dipu Moni*. (2020, July 20). Retrieved from Daily Star: <https://www.thedailystar.net/three-teachers-arrested-in-chandpur-spreading-rumours-on-social-media-against-dipu-moni-1933341>
- Webb et al. (2016, April). Digital Wildfires: Propagation, Verification, Regulation, and Responsible Innovation.
- Xiaoqian Zhu and Fengming Liu. (2017, June 21). Research on Behavior Model of Rumor Maker Based on System Dynamics. *Hindawi*.
- Zaman, A. M. (2018, April 25). *Daily sun*. Retrieved from Fake news on social media a great threat to country's stability: <https://www.daily-sun.com/arcprint/details/304499/Fake-news-on-social-media-a-great-threat-to-country%E2%80%99s-stability/2018-04-25>
- Zaman, M. S. (2019). Digital Disinformation and Communalism in Bangladesh. *China Media Research*, 15(2). Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333310094_Digital_Disinformation_and_Communalism_in_Bangladesh#:~:text=Bangladesh%20has%20been%20experiencing%20digital,dis\)information%20have%20become%20frequent](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333310094_Digital_Disinformation_and_Communalism_in_Bangladesh#:~:text=Bangladesh%20has%20been%20experiencing%20digital,dis)information%20have%20become%20frequent)