

Between Algorithms and Audiences: How Content on Global Platforms is Shaping Local Imaginings of Bangladesh

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Abstract:

Social media content creators are increasingly operating in digital media environments where platform algorithms and the viral circulation of content spread their work across borders. While many videos produced by Bangladeshi influencers highlight local markets, cuisine, clothing, or music, these representations are often shaped for the gaze of the digital-native viewer. Such viewers are growingly accustomed to globalised aesthetics of online content where narrative formats and styles of speech from around the world converge into recognisable and repeatable patterns. In the context of Bangladesh, content creators play a key role in presenting locals with a fixed idea of what contemporary Bangladesh is or what an aspirational lifestyle living in it should look like. Many creators have come to signal narrow and highly capitalised portrayals of success, social class, and desirable lifestyles through various visual and narrative cues. We can also examine the role of content creators as cultural mediators who promote local cultural expression online while simultaneously navigating - and competing against millions of other creators on - global platforms governed by algorithmic visibility. This paper examines how social media content shapes contemporary understandings of cultural practices, class dynamics and personal aspirations in Bangladesh. While existing scholarship has explored the commodification of identity and lifestyle in Western and global contexts, relatively little research has examined how creators in emerging digital media environments such as Bangladesh do the same. To bridge this gap, this paper draws on several theoretical frameworks including Actor-Network Theory (Latour) to help illuminate the relationships between creators, platforms and audiences. This paper is a scoping study that examines a purposive sample of content by top-performing Bangladeshi urban lifestyle creators on Instagram and YouTube. Through conducting analysis of visual, linguistic, and narrative choices embodied in digital content alongside exploring broader social and platform contexts, this paper examines how Bangladeshi culture is increasingly being represented in networked digital spaces and how platform logics inform the popular imagination of modern Bangladesh.

Keywords: social media, Bangladesh, cultural homogenisation, globalisation, hegemony

Strands: globalisation, culture

