Social Media for Government in Bangladesh: An Analysis of Users' Perception

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Abstract: Rise of social media has made significant change in public service delivery world wide. Similarly, a number of government departments in Bangladesh have started using social media to improve public service deliverysince September 2013 by creating an open facebook group named "Public Service Innovation Bangladesh". As a result, government officials and citizens are interacting with each other regularly through thousands of public Facebook pages/groups. Therefore, the present paper attempted to examine the scope of social media use at the public sectors in Bangladesh for service delivery and improving government- citizen interaction. In doing so, we gathered data using both questionnaire survey, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Our finding shows that government organisations are using Facebook pages and groups for internal communication and citizen engagementas well as internal communication, sharing and discussing service innovation, policy issues, new ideas and experiences among the different layers of government officers. The study reveals that organisational integration and behavioural pattern have positively been changed and in turn efficiency has been increased. Despite having some limitation we found that proper use of social media may reduce the gap between the government and the citizen.

Keywords: Social media, Facebook, service delivery, innovation, citizen engagement, transparency and accountability.

Introduction

Social media is an umbrella term that refers to the Web 2.0 based communication channels including social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Google+), blogs and microblog (e,g. blogs, wikis, Twitter) and media sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Flickr). These channels are designed for content generation, sharing and collaboration, interaction, participation and feedback. In contrast to websites, people are not limited to the passive viewing of content; social media platforms enable their users to create content and share with others, and maintain relationships that were not previously possible with an extensive and extended network of contacts.[1]

Social media is commonly used for establishing and maintaining relationships with friends and family members, communicating and interacting with the clients. Nowadays its use is not limited to keeping in touch with friends and families or marketing a product, it is also used for governmental purposes such as better and quick service delivery, to inform and vinteract with the citizens, innovation or idea sharing and problem solution, and for raising

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public awareness. Pew Internet & American Life Survey study- 2010 shows that almost a third (31%) adult internet users in the United States use social media tools to keep themselves informed about government activities.[2]

Bangladesh is one of the few Asian countries thathas been using social media channels for the government service delivery. The practice has been flourishing since 2009 with Union Digital Centre (UDC) Blog. The widespread popularity of the UDC blog led to the introduction of departmental blogs in five important directorates. Four years later, government departments started using facebook by creating an open Facebook group named "Public Service Innovation Bangladesh" in September 2013. Now, most of the government offices including field administration and service sectors have their Facebook pages/group through which citizen can interact with them. In this context, the present paper has attempted to explore the scope of social media use in the public sector in Bangladesh and find out how far the social media can be used for internal communication, service delivery and also for improving government- citizen interaction.

Methods of Data Collection

For this study seven districts are purposively selected from seven divisions. The research team had collectedusers' data (both government officials and citizens) from the selected districts through personal interview, focus group discussions and workshops. Three different structured questionnaires were used for individual interview. A total of 289 respondents have participated in questionnaire survey. Among them 121 were government officers and UDC entrepreneurs, and remaining 168 were citizens include entrepreneurs, students, small businessmen, teachers, NGO activists, journalists and lawyers. For understanding the users' perception dialogue on social media issues were held on DC offices of selected seven districts. The participants were different ranks of government officers, members of CSO, journalists, students and UDC entrepreneurs. The participants were purposively chosen on the basis of their active presence on respective DC office Facebook page. The participants elaborately discussed the benefits and the challenges of using official Facebook page/group (Table: 1).

Table 1: Methods and Number of Respondents

Methods	Respondents	Number
Questionnaire survey (survey monkey)	Government Officers -50 UDC Entrepreneurs -11	61
Questionnaire survey (survey monkey)	Facebook account administrators (government officers)	60
Questionnaire survey (personal interview)	Mass Citizens	168
Personal Interview and discussion meetings	Senior and mid-level Government officers	30
FGD	Government officers and citizens	4 FGDs (total 42 particiapnts)
Social media dialogue	Citizens and government officers in seven districts	195

A total of 289 respondents have participated in the questionnaire survey, of them 86.16% are male and 13.84% are female. The level of education of 44% of the respondents is post graduate followed by 38.06% graduate, 14.88% HSC and 3.11% SSC. Most of the respondents (89.3% citizens and 91.8% government officers) have facebook accounts while 28% citizens and 7% government officers have presence in Blog. A small number of respondents have presence in other social media sites as well. The study shows that most of the respondents (67.7 % citizens and 45.9% government officers) use social media sites every day. Only few respondents (1.64% government officers and 6% citizens) do not use social media regularly. Among the respondents, (citizens) 82.1% claim that they use They also expressed their anxiety of using social media. Among the respondents all government officers agreed that facebook is a useful tool for public engagement.

Social Media Use in Government: A Literature Inquiry

Social media provides specific functionalities for the elected officials, government departments/agencies and citizens to communicate with each other. According to Paul T. Jaeger, John Carlo Bertot and Katie Shilton social media have opened new and innovative methods for immediate and ongoing interaction between citizens and governments. Citing examples of American federal government agencies they show how quickly social media has become a primary tool to disseminate government information, connect with members of public institutions, and provide access to services.[3] In other words Kes-Erkul argues that social media can increase opportunity for users to engage in greater community participation.[4]

Social media has significant potential for promoting government service delivery; it can reduce time, cost and visit for government service recipients.As such, it is quite useful for service delivery agencies to distribute services more efficiently and rapidly. For example, the California Employment Development Department (EDD) uses Facebook and Twitter for updating employment information. They also have created YouTube channel with videos explaining the process of filling out and submitting unemployment claim documents. Such initiatives help people to avoid time-consuming mistakes and deflect a large number of incoming queries and telephone calls.[5] From the Indonesian perspective Achmad Nurmandi has concluded in his study: "The use of social media by governments can be made more open, more transparent, more responsive and accountable for its act and can provide a quick, cost-effective and twoway interactive platform for discussions and interactions of the governments with its local people, which will eventually help in better policy formulation and its effective implementation."[6]

According to Bertot *et al*. (2010), social media has four major potential strengths: collaboration, participation, empowerment, and time. It is collaborative and participatory because it provides the ability for users to connect with each [other] and form communities to socialise, share information, or to achieve a common goal or interest. They argue that

social media can be empowering to its users as it gives them a platform to speak, publish or broadcast information. In terms of time, social media technologies allow users to immediately publish information in time.[7] Based on empirical evidence Arthur Mickoleit shows that social media can bridge access and take-up gaps still faced by many traditional online government services.[8] Given such potentiality, government officials seek to leverage social media tools to improve services and communication with citizens especially segments of the population that previously were underrepresented.[9]

It is also argued that government agencies can be more transparent and accountable when they use social media in their work. Romsdahl (2005) argues that more participation in government policy-making via Internet could help revitalise dialogue between citizens and governments and promote greater participation by disenfranchised citizens and groups as they use these technologies to educate others about political issues in their communities. According to Freeman and Loo, governments can achieve efficiencyand increase user's convenience and citizen's involvementby using social network sites. Therefore social media is increasingly adopted by the government agencies.[10] However the nature of social media use in the public sector can vary from country to country, as well as within countries.

Worldwide Use of Social Media in Public Service

In many countries, government agencies have been using social network sites (like Facebook, blog, Twitter, Youtube channels) to interacs between the government and the citizen, extending government services and engaging citizens in government efforts. Delegates in the Web 2.0 Conference- 2011 suggested that the government agencies can use social media for government service delivery, citizen/community engagement, information dissemination and internal collaboration. According to Pew Research, nearly one in three online Internet users in the United States were using social media tools to access government services and information other than websites to get information from government agencies or officials.[11] All major federal agencies have a presence in social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, RSS feeds and Flickr. These channels are used to directly communicate with the public and provide better service. According to National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)'s Report-2011, seventy percent of federal agencies uses social media platforms for public outreach and internal communications. The NARA has been working for developing Web 2.0 guidance and policies for archiving Web 2.0 data. [12]

Social media has also become a part of the government communication system in the UK. Including Prime Minister's Office, Foreign Office, Department of Transport, Department of Work and Social Pension, Local Government and many other government offices are using social media channels both for internal communication, consultation and external

engagement with the citizens. BDO local government social media annual survey shows that the local government members (councillors) turn to social media as a tool to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of services.[13] The British Cabinet office published their Social Media Guidance for the civil servants in May 2012 and updated on October 2014. The guideline is formulated to help the users to understand how a social media account can be managed and how content can be developed.

In Australia, public service agencies and sub-national authorities have a presence in different social network sites including Blogs, Twitter. Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Google+, RSS feeds and Podcast. They use social platforms to engage with the community as well as for internal communication. Examining six Facebook (FB) pages Sultana Lubna Alam & David Walker have shown that the FB pages are being used for communication, compliance, recruitment, promotion and crowd sourcing. The government encourages and supports the use of social media platforms for conducting government business. For providing guidance on the management of official social media accounts each department or agency has its own social media policy.

Following the practices of western countries, Asian also have started using social media channels to communicate and disseminate information to their citizens. Study shows that approximately 30 percent of Asian governments are using Web 2.0 tools for communication and information dissemination while others are not fully utilizing the social media tools to reach their citizens and potential users.[14] Among the Asian countries, the Japanese government uses social media platforms at the municipality level for community building, democratic process and disaster management From the experience of earthquake and tsunami of 2011 studies have hows that social media is helpful during and after disaster to trace out family members, collect donations for relief efforts and also to keep the public informed about rescue program. After the earthquake and tsunami social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook increased about six times, and some new social network sites like 'Line' (Japanese chat app) was also launched to respond to the disaster.

Indonesia has the highest social network penetration rate (77.0%) among South-East Asian countries. After the presidential election in 2014 the Joko Widodo government launched a new form of communication with social media (Facebook Jokowi Center) to get public responses and complaints from the community as well as to streng then public awareness.

For example, Ministry of Education & Culture and related directorates use Facebook and Twitter to respond to teachers, students' needs and report on the progress and achievement of various education programs.Social media like facebook, Zing, Vietnamnet are the most popular sites in Vietnam. People use these sites for sharing information, opinions and keeping in touch with friends and family. However government controls media and monitors online content. Some local government officials have started using social media to communicate with the public and to take appropriate measures after receiving feedback and suggestions.

Sri Lanka also started using social media for official purposes. On 16 January 2016, Sri Lanka's prime minister Ranil Wickre mesinghe announced that the officials would use social media to seek views and public opinions on a proposed constitution aiming at preventing a return to ethnic war. The government has taken different initiatives to encourage the use of web-based services. For example, the Department of Elections created a Facebook page named 'Tell Commissioner' and invited the public to share complaints and evidence related to violations of the electionlaw (www.facebook. com/groups/tellcommissioner). Through this page Department of Elections engaged people for watching and reporting on violations of electoral laws by political parties and candidates.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube are the most popular social networking sites used by Indian government departments for answering public queries, extending government servicesand increasing public participation in government efforts. The Department of Posts is the first government organisation that started using a social networking site with a Twitter account tilted 'Post Office India in 2010. They have a dedicated team of people for responding queries of followers and updating their achievements, promotions and programmes.[15] Gradually other government organisations came up with twitter and facebook accounts. Especially Modi government from its beginning is emphasizing using social media in the government sector to connect people with their activities. Thus by the end of 2014 about 90% of the ministries entered the arena on social media.Apart from these ministers and civil servants use Twitter and Facebook page tomanage departmental issues and to communicate with the public.

From the literature review and practices it appears that social media has the potential for public engagement, emergency management and promotion of departmental activities. It is beyond doubt that social media can reduce the gap between organization and citizens, and can make an easy access to government services. However social media especially Facebook is wiedly using in the government offcies in Bangladesh todisseminate information, reach out to citizens and engage with them in policy discussion, there is few research in this area. From this context the present study may reduce the research gap and open up a new research window.

Social Media Use in Government: Present Status of Bangladesh

Due to the strengthening of internet infrastructure and the growing number of internet users, the number of social media users is also increasing in Bangladesh. Study shows that the number of Facebook users has increased in Bangladesh 3.37 crores in January 2019 with a penetration rate of 19.9%.[16] One of the major reasons for rapid growth of Facebook use in Bangladesh is smartphone penetration. According to BTRC the number of Smartphone users in Bangladesh has reached 157.544 Million at the end of January, 2019.[17]

The smartphone enables the subscriber to access internet across the country. A survey shows that among the total Facebook users 97.46% use this tool from their smartphone (Table 1).

Table 1: Social Media Users in Bangladesh

Social Media Sites	Number of Subscribers (Number in %)	Mobile Social Media (Number in %)
Facebook	94.52	97.46
Twitter	1.25	0.43
Tumblr (Blog)	0.09	0.02
YouTube	2.55	1.33
Pinterest	1.18	0.64
Instagram	0.18	0.14
others	0.33	0
Total Social Media User	100	100

Source: https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/bangladesh (accessed on 0320- 0905-2019)

Including all Deputy Commissioner's offices and Divisional Commissioner's offices, more than 800 government organisations have access to social media with their official Facebook page/group, and a few organisations have blogs and YouTube channels. Hence, it can be said that government departments are mostly using Facebook. A review of social media use in government organisations shown in Table 2 reflects that from ministry to field administration Facebook is widely embraced to improve service delivery. However, they have no written guideline or strategy for social media usages. Facebook was initially started in government organisations by some government officers in their initiatives for problem solution and response to public comment.

Table 2: Social Media Usages in the Bangladesh Government Organizations

Name of the Office	Number	FB Page/Group
Ministry and Division	61	61
Directorate/Department	351	351
Divisional Commissioners' Offices	08	08
District Commissioners' offices	64	64
Upzilla Administration	489	489

Source: Authors

Respondents' Overview

As the use of social media, especially Facebook is continuously growing across the country one of the core objectives of this study is to assess public perception about the usages of social networking sites in the government organisations. This section presents respondents' perceptions about the benefits of Facebook use in government organisations in Bangladesh.

Goals of official Facebook page/group: Among the social networking sites, Facebook helps government organisations for building a stronger social relationship with the citizens and improving public service delivery. By using different features like status updates to the wall, application for polling, discussion, post and sharing videos and photos, government officers can take the advantages of public engagement, but it depends on what the organisation's goals are.

The respondents (government officers) are requested to give their opinions about official Facebook page/group. Respondents have listed different points which are presented in figure 1.1. Most of the respondents think that ensuring transparency and accountability can be the major goals (40.7%). Survey data shows that 22.2% respondents put emphasis on response to the public queries/comments, 20.4% on publicity and 14.8% on public awareness building. These are also associated with transparency and accountability goals. It is revealed that respondents have seen Facebook as a means of ensuring transparency and accountability of the government.
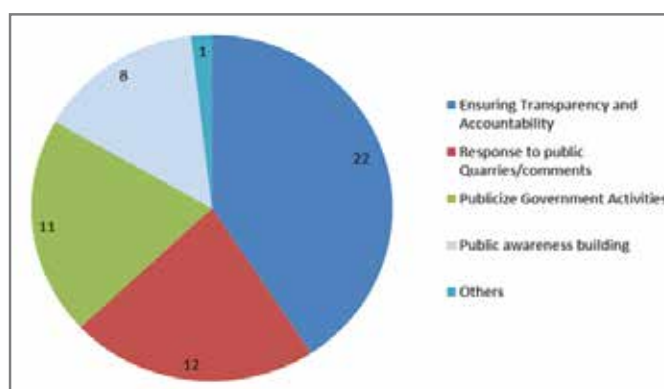

Fig. 1.1- Probable Goals of Official Facebook Page/Group

Source: Field survey data

Reasons for Using Government Facebook page/group: Survey data presented in figure 2.1 shows that that government agencies use social networking sites (especially Facebook) for a wide range of purposes such as knowing public opinion and giving feedback on their comments (22.8%), publicize official events/activities (29.8%), communications with fellow colleagues (17.5%), sharing information and ideas with colleagues (21.1%), and problem solution (3.5%).
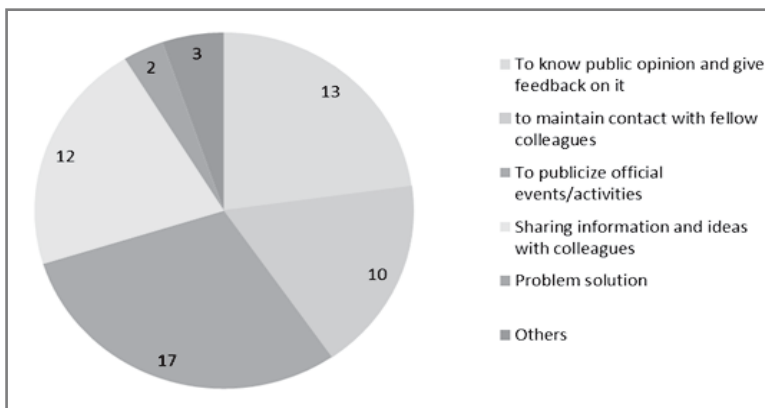
Fig. 2.1- Reasons for Using Government facebook page/group (Government Officers perception)

Source: Field survey data

Figure 2.2 shows that respondents mostly use government Facebook pages to know about government events/programs (79.7%). About 53% respondents use facebook page for getting government notice/advertisement, 39.1% for posting contents and 30% for like/sharing content.
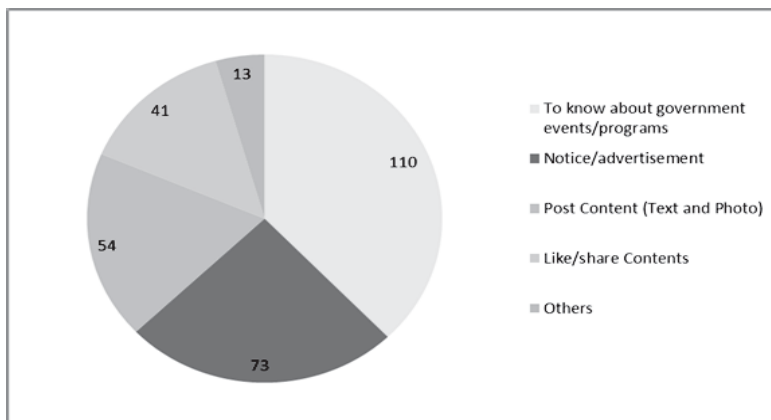

Fig. 2.2- Reasons for Using Government facebook page/group (citizens; perception)

Source: Field survey data

Impact of social media Use: It is known from the interviews that social networking sites like Facebook can improve decision-making by allowing citizens to contribute facts, ideas and identifying problems. Social media can improve transparency as well through discussions or debates. Many government organisationsare now inviting citizens to join their official facebook page/group and post their ideas, comments and recommendations about government policy or service delivery. In this context, 61 government officers (12 respondents skipped the question) and 168 citizens are interviewed to know their perceptions about possible impacts of social media in government organisations. The survey

data presented in figure 3.1 & 3.2 shows that social media use is associated with several benefits for government organisations. For example most of the respondents (both government officers and citizens) strongly agree that social media use can increase
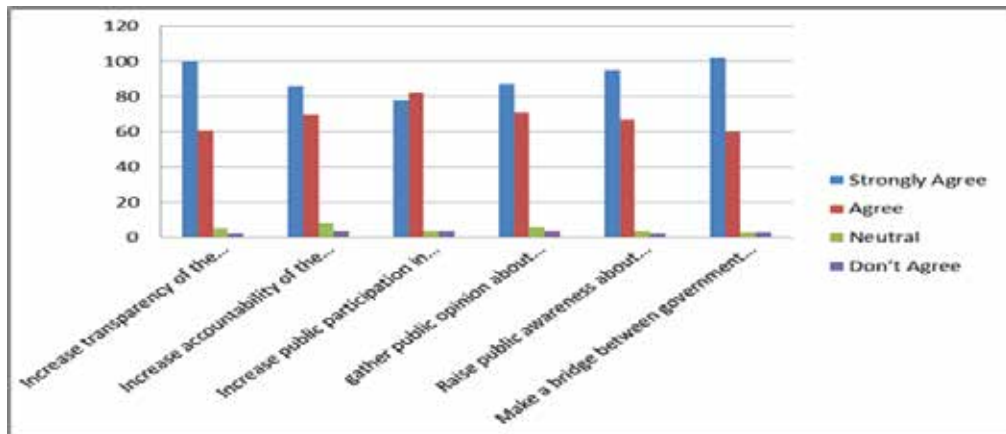

Fig. 3.1- Impacts of using social media on government organization (Citizens' Perception)
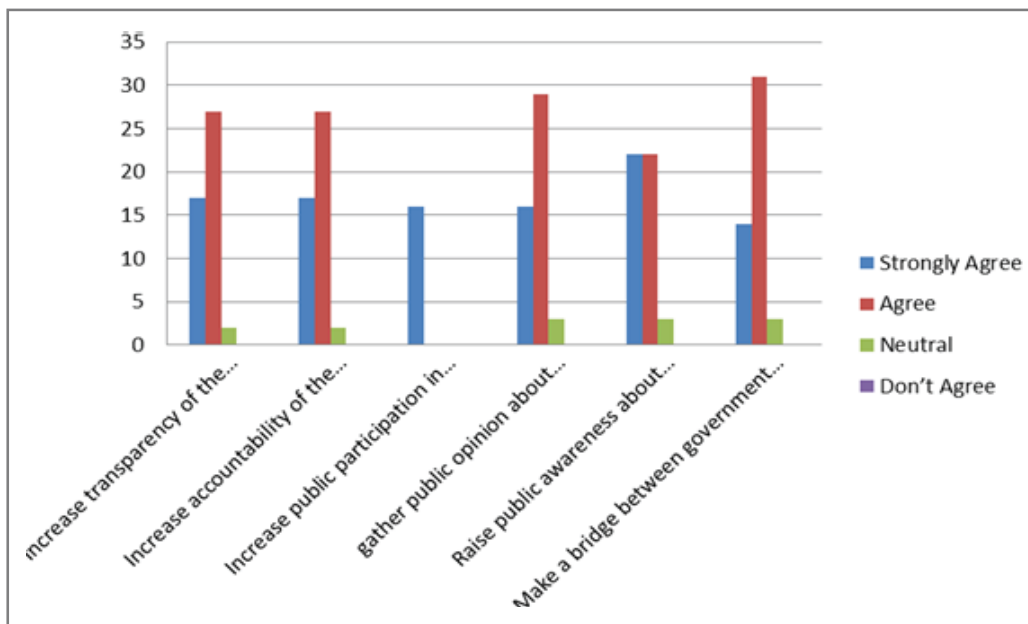
Source: Field survey data

Fig 3.2- Impacts of using social media on government organizations (Government Officers' Perception)

Source: Field survey data

transparency of organizations and accountability of the government employees,involve more and morecitizens in decision making and implementation, can make it possible to know public opinion as well as to raise public awareness about government policies and

programs. Citizens also express that use of social media can create opportunity for making a bridge between government and citizens. However few respondents do not agree with these positive impacts of social media use.

Government officers have expressed opinions on the question about whether social media help interaction between different departments and between senior-junior officers. On this issue 68.75% of the respondents moderately agree, and 25% strongly agree that social media is a useful tool to communicate with different government organisations especially between the field and central administration. However, one respondent does not agree and two respondents are neutral (Figure 4.5) on this point.

Traditionally, there is a minimum opportunity for the junior government officers to provide input to the decision making process. In this context, social networking sites have been seen as useful tool to increase more involvement in the decision-making process. Most of the respondents (72.34%) moderately agree, and 21.28% strongly agree that social media can reduce gap between senior and junior officers and can ensure broader participation in the decision-making process (Figure 3.3). For example, every government officer can be a member of 'Public Service Innovation Bangladesh' Facebook group and participate in discussions on policy issues, share new ideas and experiences and junior officers can exchange their views with top level government officers (i.e. Principal Secretary, Cabinet secretary).
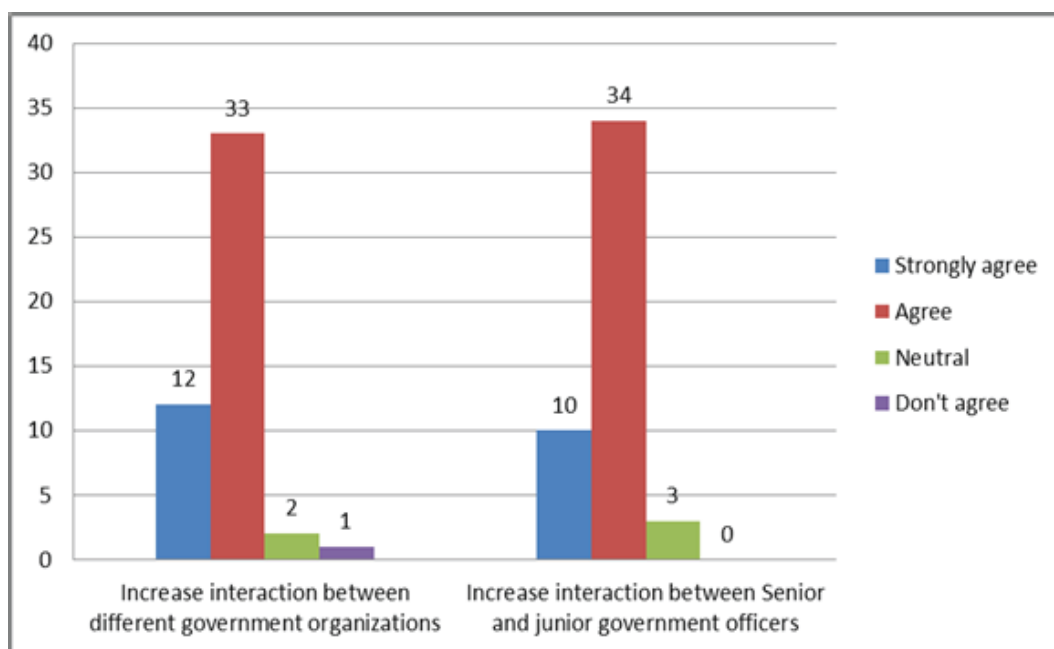

Fig. 3.3- Impact on organizational interaction (govt. oficers' perception)
Source: Field survey data

How can social media help government organisations and citizens: In a multiple answer question, respondents are asked if usages of Facebook (official account) in government organisations help them in any way. Among 61 government officers 47 respond to the question while 12 keep silent. The citizens (168 respondents) are also asked if they are benefited by the government official Facebook page/group. It is found that the respondents (those who answered the question) have a different opinion regarding the benefits of using social media. However, very negligible number of respondents (citizens only) has found the government official facebook ineffective. None of the government officers has responded negatively.

One of the findings of the questionnaire survey is that most of the government officers and citizens agree about the benefits of using social media in government organisations. For example, 72.34% of government officers moderately and 27.66% strongly agree that social media is useful for addressing public demand, complain and grievances quickly. Among the respondents, 31.91% strongly agree, and 63.83% moderately agree that social media is useful to help colleagues for problem solution and decision making. Regarding service innovation 36.17% strongly and 61.70% moderately agree that social media tools are useful
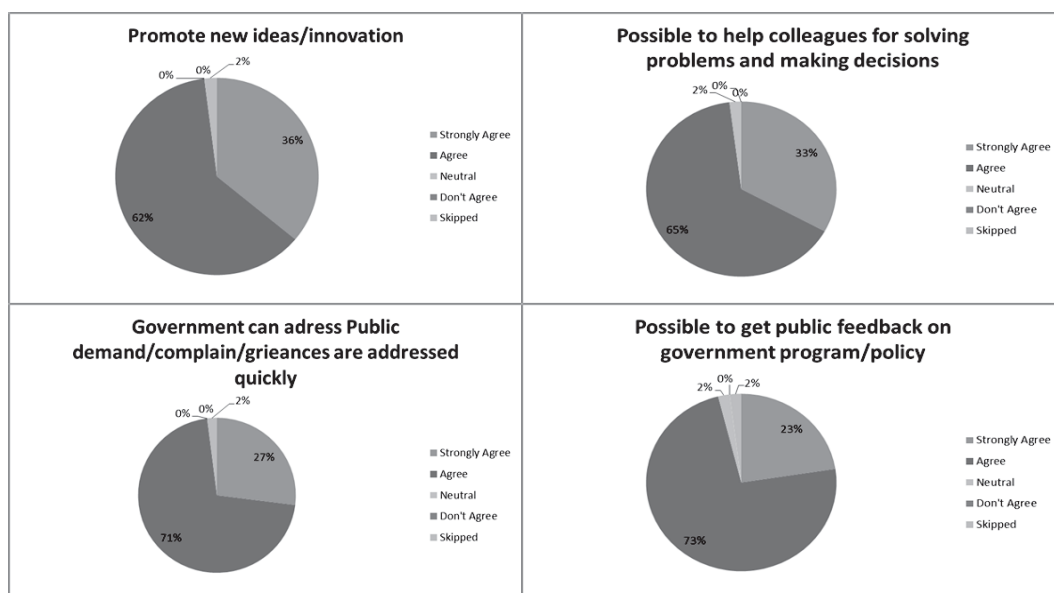
Source: Field survey data

for promoting service innovation and new ideas. The survey data show that 27.66% respondents strongly and 72.34% moderately agree that social media help government agencies addressing public demand, complain or grievances quickly (Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4).

Regarding the benefits of using social media in government organisations, citizens' perception is found positive. Among the respondents (citizens) 57.7% strongly and 37.5 % moderately agree thatsocial media is useful to the citizens for raising their demands, making complain or grievances to the higher authority. They also think (44.5% strongly and 44% moderately) that government takes quick actions if any issue/problem comes out in the social media (Figure 4.5, 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8). Hence, social media like Facebook is more effective than traditional media if people seek government support. However, a few of the respondents do not agree with others regarding the benefits of social media and the reasons behind their ideas are explored from the FGDs. Most of the FGD participants explain that some social media users of their region/area are not informed about the existence of government on Facebook. Some of them report that they do not get response quickly/adequately from the page administrators. Some of the participants have suggested posting more service-oriented comments.
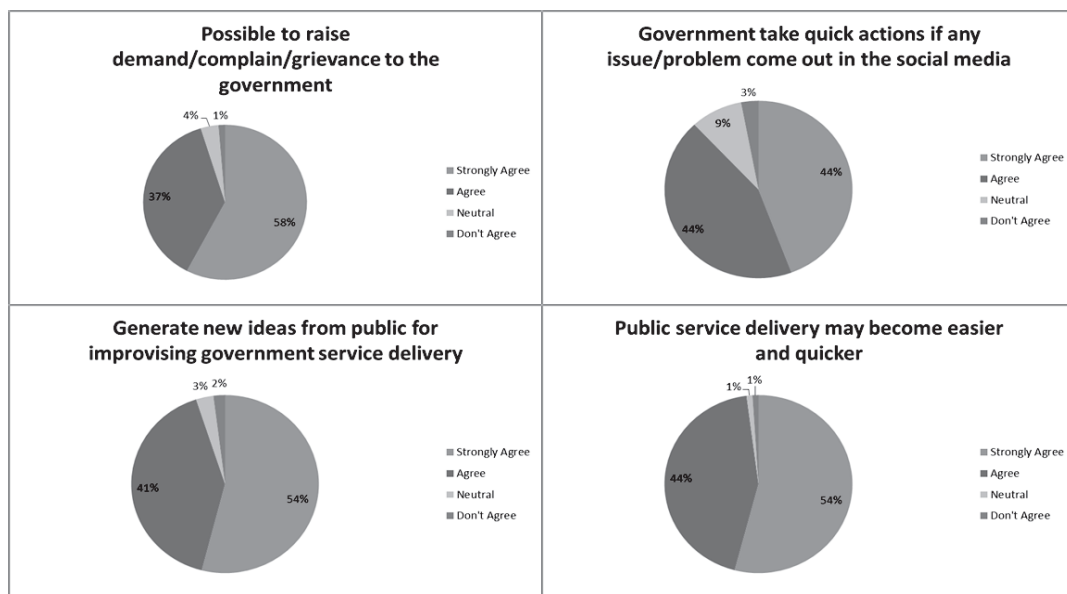
Source: Field survey data

The participants have given some examples about the benefit of using social media in government offices. The following story (shown in box) is about Jail canal of Barishal. The canal is recovered from the encroachers demolishing illegal structures by the district administration as a reaction to public request posted in *Barishal Problems and Prospects* facebook group.

Case: Recovering Jail Canal from Encroachers

19 April 2016, 2.31 pm: One group member named Momena Shifa Rumki posted a comment with some photos of *Jail Khal* drawing attention to the district administration to stop environmental damage by earth filling and to protect all the canals situated within Barisal City. By next day (20 April 2016 from 03.09pm- 09.58pm) 17 group members posted their comments supporting her post. Following the facebook group initiative more than 300 Students of Barisal Town High school have signed a petition in order to eradicate illegal structures from the Jail Khal of Barisal city and handed over this to DC.

29 April 2016, 10:45pm: On the basis of above post and public support DC Barisal informed the issue to the Barisal City Corporation for taking necessary action in this regard and posted the copy of this letter to the FB Group.

4 May 2016 at 3:17pm: DC posted his comments with relevant pictures about the actions that have been taken by him to recover the canal from encroachers. The post said that along with the Barisal City Corporation many illegal structures were demolished from *Jail Khal* banks including shops, storehouses and houses. Upon his action many group members instantly replied by giving him thanks and appreciation. Finally *Jail khal* was recovered by the district administration and citizens were engaged with the whole process.[18]

**Service Innovation through Social Media**

Regarding the views on the impact of social media usages to promote service innovation, 93.9% respondents reply affirmatively, but a small number of respondents (6.1%) reply negatively. Those who have answered affirmatively are approached to mention how social media can contribute to service innovation. In multiple answer questions, the highest number of respondents (100%) express opinion in favour of sharing innovative ideas with colleagues and public and 46.9% mention about getting feedback from the stake holders. About 22.4% of the respondents point out that social media has created the opportunity for interaction between organisations and employees which in turn has promoted service innovation. Among the respondents, 8.2% emphasise on constructive criticism and 6.1% mention the necessity of a variety of opinions in the social media.

Public Perception about Problems and Risks: Social media have the potential to improve organisational transparency, accountability, service delivery and decision making. Despite these opportunities, there are some problems, risks and challenges related to privacy, account management, audience behaviour, ICT infrastructure and publicity. These problems, risks and challenges are identified in this study. About 36 respondents have mentioned multiple problems and risks while six respondents do not feel any problem or risk while using government facebook page/group.

Despite the problems and risks facebook is an effective means to keep contact with the citizens for three reasons: first,easy to access through smartphone; secondly, people mostly

use facebook rather than other social networking sites; and thirdly many Facebook users in the country is overgrowing. The respondents feel that government should take necessary initiatives for mitigating above mentioned problems, risks and challenges.
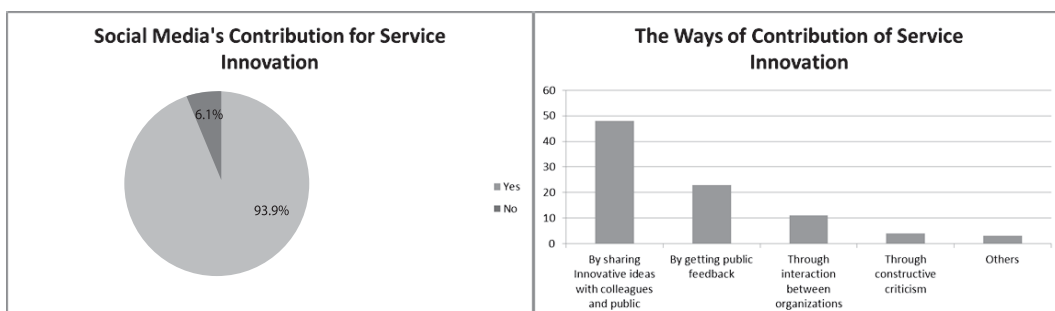
Source: Field survey data

Table 4: Problems and Risks of Using Government Facebook Page/Group

Problems and Risks	FGD Participants	Questionnaire Survey	
		Government officers	Citizens
Users may fall into trouble if they post about administrative problem or faults	26.19%	-	61.1%
It might be hard to maintain administrative privacy	23.80%	28.6%	55.6%
Government officers may be influenced to take action hurriedly which might not be appropriate	21.43%	40.8%	50.0%
Differences may arise between government policy and its explanation by field administration	40.8%	42.9%	-
Others	-	10.2%	-
No problem at all	14.3	36.7%	89.29%

Source: Field survey data

Field data shows that government organisations rapidly feel encouraged to use social media tools specially facebook for official purpose. At the end of 2015, all ministries, directorates/departments, divisional commissioners' offices, DC offices and Upazila administrations entered the arena of bacebook. Some tech-aware government officers have contributed in this regard. Beside public engagement, government officers have also used facebook for internal communication, monitoring official activities and promoting service innovation.

Respondents (both government officers and citizens) have mentioned that social media especially facebook offers opportunities for sharing information, message and other contents quickly to enhance organisational goals. Among the respondents, citizens advocate for the issue of quick response from the page administrator/s, posting of need-based information, promoting public awareness about drug abuse and child marriage and taking action on public request while the government officers emphasise building public awareness about responsible use of social media. Both groups of respondents have suggested improving content quality and publicity of official pages. According to their opinion, the most popular official pages are those that disseminate need-based information, respond quickly to public comments and do not publicise their events or personal activities.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion it can be concluded that social media especially facebook offers opportunities for sharing information, message and other contents quickly to enhance organisational goals. Breaking the established tradition government organisations are coming out from red-tapismby adopting facebook as a tool for internal communication and decision making. Public engagement has also been increased through social media. On the other site social mediais useful for the citizens for raising their demands, making complains or grievances to the higher authorities. Based on public opinion government can take quick actions. Above all the gap between the government and the citizen can be reduced by providing wider participation in the decision making process through social media usages. tIt can be useful for listening to the public voice and raising public awareness about government policy and program. But successful and proper usage of social media depends upon the social media strategy/policy, platform and content selection, risk management, targeting and reaching audience, account management and a guide line for the users. Thereby the government agencies should havea social media policy and a guideline for the citizen.

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