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# **Representation and Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bangladesh through Social Media**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has declared Baul songs (UNESCO, 2008) and Jamdani saree (UNESCO, 2013) as 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity,' stating their importance as a symbol of identity, dignity, and self-recognition in Bangladesh. The potential roles of social media in the process of preserving intangible cultural heritage (hereafter ICH) offer a space for awareness-building, knowledge creation and diffusion of innovations. The fields of ICH that emphasize on the methods and desired roles of online media are expanding with the development of new tools for online data extraction, analysis and visual presentation (Severo & Venturini, 2015).

Bangladesh is one of the next eleven countries and home to more than 160 million people. The country is experiencing an exponential growth of social media users due to the increase in affordability of smartphones, literacy rate, education level, and adoption of Internet services and applications. Bangladesh, with its digital agenda, has a favorable environment for the transformation and development of digital media and culture. There exists unexplored, assumably underutilized, and potential roles of Internet-mediated communication about the two nominated ICH of Bangladesh. Towards the goal of strategically representing and diffusing ICH through social media, this research explores the current roles of social media in the transmission of ICH in the virtual world. The research question is: How are Baul song and Jamdani weaving as intangible cultural heritage of Bangladesh represented and disseminated through social media platforms?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The convention for the safeguarding of ICH (UNESCO, 2003) mentions that cultural heritage deals with tangible and living heritage. With four basic characteristics, ICH has five domains (Diwasa, Bandhu, & Bhim, 2007, pp. 9-10): oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. Baul song covers the first four domains, and Jamdani is part of all the domains. This study takes a step towards exploring the characteristics and domain knowledge disseminated through social networks.

Dominick defines social media as "online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation, sharing, collaboration and linkage" (2012, p. 24). All social media fall into nine different categories: (1) social networking sites (*Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace*, etc.); (2) social news sites (*Digg, Reddit, NewsVine, Kirtsy, BallHype*, etc.); (3) social bookmarking sites (*Delicious, Magnolia, Diigo*, etc.); (4) social sharing sites (*YouTube, Flickr*, etc.); (5) social events sites (*Eventful, Meetup and Upcoming*); (6) Microblogging (*Twitter*); (7) Wikis (Wikipedia); (8) Blogs; (9) Forums and message boards (Evans, 2010). The character and technical possibilities of these diverse media types show how different forms of participation and co-creation can be integrated into cultural heritage communication.

Facebook is the most popular social networking site in Bangladesh (Alexa, 2016). Currently, the number of Facebook users in Bangladesh is 30 million, and a new user joins in Facebook in every 12 seconds, which is more than the birth rate of the country (Sujan, 2015). For this study, Facebook is selected by considering the adoption rate in Bangladesh.

## ICH IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has been a repository of tangible and intangible cultural heritage for many centuries. However, ICH is a relatively new term and concept in the academic sphere of Bangladesh. Currently, due to the lack of sufficient awareness about ICH protection, parts of ICH is in imminent danger in many areas of Bangladesh. There are very few governmental and non-governmental institutions and agencies, at a national and local level, that, directly and indirectly, play the vital roles towards the management and promotion of ICH. The mainly responsible public bodies are 1. the Ministry of Culture Affairs, Bangladesh, 2. Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, and 3. Bangla Academy.

The two Bangladeshi elements inscribed on the UNESCO representative list of ICH of Humanity are

“Baul Songs” (traditional music) and “Traditional art of Jamdani weaving.”

*Baul Songs* are pioneered by Fakir Lalon Shah (1774-1890), the greatest spokesperson of the marginalized Baul tradition of the undivided Bengal. UNESCO (2008) states that Bauls live either near a village or travel from place to place and earn their living by singing, involving the instruments Ektara (a one-stringed instrument), the lute dotara (two-stringed), and a drum called dubki. The Baul movement, at its peak in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, has now regained popularity among the rural population of Bangladesh. Their music and way of life have influenced a large segment of Bengali culture, and particularly the compositions of Nobel Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

*The traditional art of Jamdani weaving* was “exclusively possessed by the weavers of Dacca aurung” (Gillow and Barnard 2008, p. 186). It is estimated that there were 36 varieties of muslin products in South Asian region, and Jamdani was one of the very best varieties of the muslin (Iqbal, 2013, p. 3). Jamdani is a vividly patterned, sheer cotton fabric, traditionally woven on a handloom by craftspeople and apprentices around Dhaka. Jamdani textiles combine intricacy of design with muted or vibrant colors, and the finished garments are highly breathable (UNESCO, 2013).

## METHODOLOGY

The study is anchored on the cultural representation and transmission function of media. The major thesis of the theory, as put forward by Laswell (1948, pp. 203-243) and Wright (1974, pp. 198-199), refers to the ability of the media to learn various norms and values that exist in society and transfer from one generation to the next. Moreover, the term ‘representation’ refers to the construction in any medium of aspects of ‘reality’ such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and heritage through various ways. The research methodology applied in this study is content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). Ten Facebook pages are identified by searching phrases containing ICH, Jamdani, Baul song, and Bangladesh. Five of the pages are official (government or institutional) and five are non-institutional. Data are extracted and analyzed by using the analytics application sociograph.io.

## RESULTS

The extracted data (end-date was 31 December 2015) are analyzed from the selected 10 Facebook pages (see Table 1). Three main categories of actions identified are (see Table 2):

- ICH representation role (that is media formats representing ICH),
- ICH dissemination role (that is, actions of change agent’s role), and
- ICH recipient or adopter role (that is, clients’ or visitors’ actions showing interest).

**Table 1.** Overview Of The Selected Facebook Pages

Page name	Web address	Category regarding identity	Category regarding ICH issue	Duration of data collection
<b>1. Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Bangladesh</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/culture.bd/?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/culture.bd/?fref=ts</a>	Governmental	ICH	6 Aug, 2014 - 31 Dec, 2015
<b>2. Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation-BPC</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/BangladeshTourismCorporation/timeline">https://www.facebook.com/BangladeshTourismCorporation/timeline</a>	Governmental	ICH	2 Sept, 2013 - 16 Jan, 2016
<b>3. Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/BangladeshShilpakalaAcademy">https://www.facebook.com/BangladeshShilpakalaAcademy</a>	Governmental	ICH	18 Oct, 2012 - 31 Dec, 2015
<b>4. Bangla Academy</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/bangla.academy.org">https://www.facebook.com/bangla.academy.org</a>	Governmental	ICH	13 Feb, 2014 - 31 Dec, 2015
<b>5. UNESCO, DHAKA</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/unescodhaka">https://www.facebook.com/unescodhaka</a>	International Organization	ICH	1 Jan, 2012 - 31 Dec, 2015
<b>6. Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bangladesh</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Tangible-and-Intangible-Cultural-Heritage-of-Bangladesh-455085624540045/?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/Tangible-and-Intangible-Cultural-Heritage-of-Bangladesh-455085624540045/?fref=ts</a>	Personal	ICH	17 Dec, 2012 - 31 Dec, 2015
<b>7. Save the Heritages of Bangladesh</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/saveheritagebd/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/saveheritagebd/</a>	Personal	ICH	1 Jan, 2012 - 31 Dec, 2015
<b>8. Jamdani Sharee - Heritage of Bangladesh</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/JamdaniShareeBD">https://www.facebook.com/JamdaniShareeBD</a>	Personal	Jamdani	18 Nov, 2012 - 31 Dec, 2015
<b>9. JAMDANI::: A BENGALI HERITAGE</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/JAMDANI.BANGLADESHI.HERITAGE/?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/JAMDANI.BANGLADESHI.HERITAGE/?fref=ts</a>	Personal	Jamdani	18 Nov, 2012 - 31 Dec, 2015
<b>10. Baul Gann</b>	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/baul407/?fref=ts">http://www.facebook.com/baul407/?fref=ts</a>	Personal	Jamdani	1 January, 2012 - 31 December, 2015

Representation includes photos, videos, status (multimodal), comments (multimodal), and other file formats. In this case, multimodality includes text, video, photo, link, tag and files (various formats). Dissemination includes the following actions: status post (multimodal), reply to comments (multimodal), share, tag, and events. The visitors of the page, who are typically in the information receiving role,

interact with the actions like, comment (multimodal), and tag. Tagging is not included in the analysis as it is not analyzed by sociograph.io.

**Table 2.** Representation, dissemination action and connection of people with ICH of Bangladesh

Page no	Representation					Dissemination			Client-impact		
	Photo	Video	Status	Comment	Other file format	Status Post	Reply to comment	Share	Event	Like	Comment
1	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	11	0
5	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	14	0
6	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	0
8	6	0	8	1	0	8	0	3	0	152	1
10	8	37	9	19	0	9	0	140	0	413	19
Total	20	37	20	20	0	21	0	143	1	593	20

Through analysis of selected Facebook pages, some distinctness can be highlighted:

1. Most importantly, among the first five pages, none of the pages contain posts that have video, share, and comment. This means that every institutional page for ICH in Bangladesh is almost inactive (see Table 2).
2. Constitutive and detail explanation of ICH of Bangladesh are not found in any of the selected Facebook pages. The social networking site cannot play the ideal role of information dissemination, especially, when a proper informative Facebook page is necessary for the transmission of ICH.
3. Governmental and institutional or official Facebook pages highlight high officials' activities but not about the ICH.
4. The information about UNESCO's acceptance of two ICH of Bangladesh is not available on any of the Facebook pages. Personnel responsible for press and media should be directed to the operations and maintenance of ICH representation and dissemination activities through Facebook and other social media platforms.
5. Video sharing is essential for promoting and safeguarding of ICH but is found on only one page (see Table 2). Since sufficient content and video are not available, the Facebook pages cannot play an effective role in disseminating and safeguarding the ICH. As more video are uploaded online and posted in the page 'Baul Gann', the page gets more shares likes and comments.
6. Private pages are more active than official pages regarding ICH issues.

7. ICH items are represented and interpreted as commoditized objects on personal Facebook pages, especially on Jamdani issue.

Online digital objects (i.e. video, images, web pages, and other file formats) representing ICH of Bangladesh should be developed with strategic initiative.

Sharing is central to the diffusion process; through social networking sites, online promotion of the digital objects representing ICH can bring awareness and revive those.

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