

## Research Article

# Global Market Knowledge and Technological Awareness in Bangladeshi Publishing Industry

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## Abstract

This dissertation endeavours to portray the designs for globalization and technological evolution in small-nation publishing industries such as Bangladesh. Publishing is an art form which involves an extensive use of technology. Alternatively, publishing inspires inventions that evolve with advanced technology. It is an acknowledged fact that globalization is connected intricately with technological revolution. Globalization observes that ideologies and modern thinking are inspired by widespread content readily accessible to global citizens. Measuring an unconstrained productive activity from the publishing industry helps navigate the robust growth perspective of a nation. This assessment also helps to decipher whether, as a small nation developing country, it is ready to adapt to the changes or not. While investigating if the Bangladeshi publishing industry is digitally efficient or ready to acclimatize to spontaneous changes in the modern world, a few of the industry's leading authors and publishers came forward to help accomplish the objective of this research. The prime finding from the study is that there is keenness among the authors and publishers to explore advanced technological tools and opportunities and despair for no available service provision. Another critical revelation is the *lack of research* done to improve the conditions and find answers to the unanswered problems in the Bangladeshi publishing industry.

## Keywords

Bangladesh, Publishing, Globalization, Technological Evolution, Small Nation Publishing

## 1. Introduction

Since the dawn of the printing press and publishing, it has been relevant to and accompanied by 'High Technology' [1]. According to present standards, High-Tech refers to everything related to coding, modern illustrations, genre-specific typesetting, designing, distribution and formatting. Technological processes have progressed and transcended the barriers of time and place, namely two decades ago, mostly since the introduction of Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) in 2007. The availability of e-books and audiobooks has changed the perception of knowledge acquisition. Words are

no longer confined within the limits of paper, and the accessibility tools are improving and modernizing. A day in the near future is imminent when it will not be necessary even to command the screens by touch, but it will follow the gestures of the brain or movement of the iris.

As wondrous as it may seem, technological inventions had always appeared fanatical at first. Gutenberg was accused of witchcraft when he employed his invention to print out copies of the Bible and later was compelled to reveal his secret invention, the movable Type. The adaptation and dependency

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on technological tools seen in the most demanding book markets such as the UK, US, Germany or France is not only a process to keep up with the title demand but also a convenient method to preach ideas in the essence of globalization.

According to Castells' theory of the 'network society' [2], globalization is predominantly connected with technological revolution. He emphasizes the expression that Globalization was therefore invented for the expansion of capitalism, and the spectrum has been throttling the development of capitalistic society ever since. This dynamic of globalization has stimulated local cultural industries, and, although it sprouted from a global theme, it is perceived differently in different geographical locations [3]. Bangladesh is such an example where the population growth is robust and demand for literature is seemingly huge, but the country grapples to adapt to new technology to increase the scope of adaptability for globalization.

Book publishers are accustomed to using traditional software for formatting and typesetting and there are almost no illustrations included to give the title an attractive appearance, the exception being the children's books. In the later segment, we do not observe innovation as well. Pop-up or character books are nonexistent along with no interactive stories to play along. The concept of book editing and proofreading is ambiguous in the Bangladeshi publishing market, while in publishing centrals, these are considered to be prestigious career options.

Needless to say, the market is not quite flourishing with respect to the vast population. Around 2751 new titles were published in the Ekushey book fair of 2024, while around 180,000 to 200,000 books are published in the UK annually [4, 5]. According to this data, a total of 2687 new titles are released each year in the UK per one million population, whereas only 15 books were released per million population in Bangladesh the following year. However, this data is only concerning the titles released in the month of February, but assuming this is a major event in Bangladesh book publishing, the number wouldn't change dramatically.

Categorically, there are some Bengali writers at present receiving acclamations for their contributions to the international writing community, such as Tahmima Anam, or the most recent phenomenon Sanya Rushdi. However, globalization of publishing and literature is a very different eventuality than being published in an international language. It is rather bringing the global audience to the threshold by investing in one's own language through the spirit of diversity and multiculturalism. To achieve excellence in this laborious endeavor, only embracing the offerings of technologies could pave a glorious way.

## 2. The Publishing Sector in Bangladesh

To analyse this topic, qualitative interviewing method is used to compare responses from selected publishers and authors from Bangladesh towards their enthusiasm for techno-

logical adaptation in the publishing industry and their approach toward globalization. Three publishers and Four authors from Bangladesh were interviewed for this study and they were carefully chosen to discern perspectives from both young and experienced representatives who dwell on this trade. A different set of questions was used for publishers and authors. To understand the patterns and themes with highest clarity and to be precise with the findings according to the objective of the research question, a thematic analysis approach is endorsed.

### Interviewed Participants

#### Authors

1. Ashraful Shumon
2. Riajul Islam Xulian
3. Mayeesha Farjana
4. Swapnil Chakraborty

#### Publishing House

1. Meera Prokashon\*
2. Benzene Prokashon
3. Oddhay Publication

## 3. Result

### 3.1. Findings from the Author Group

The findings portray the sentiments of authors from Bangladesh. Their outlooks, observations, and expectations from the local and global market are reflected in the answers here. Also, we have found amongst the responses an enthusiasm to participate in research about publishing made for the first time in the Bangladeshi publishing industry's history.

#### 3.1.1. Experience with Publishing Houses and Current Level of Satisfaction

In any trade, a healthy relationship between the client and the company is a must to maintain. The success of a product in the market relies heavily on the client-personnel relationship and to understand the dynamics of digitization by mutual cooperation in Bangladeshi publishing trade, it is a must we investigate this matter.

Author Mayeesha Farjana stated that she had, till now worked with five publishing houses. However the experience was not that sweet. Only one publisher had paid her the author's advance, and another one was in the process of organizing the contract. She said, "Other than the financial aspect, the experience is not that bad and rather fulfilling."

Author Riajul Islam Xulian had worked with two publishing houses, and he said that he was fully satisfied with both. He said, "I have heard so much negative information about the publishers of our country. But I've waited to publish my book for a long time. I wanted to understand the dynamics of the publishing sector of my country. Then I used my findings to pick up my publishers. And I am satisfied."

We receive a new outlook from Author Ashraful Shumon. He said that only 1 out of 4 publishing houses he had worked with provided the support an author needed. He had made a classification of the publishing houses, the old and the new. “The old is the source of systemic chaos”, he said, “most of them aren’t co-operative and not interested in helping an author to grow.” He praised the new ones and branded them as a game changer. He expressed hope that through the new publishing houses, the industry may finally meet a revolution.

### 3.1.2. Experience with Digital Publishing

Upon asking the authors to define their idea of digital publishing, all four of them gave different answers. Xulian mentioned different digital devices and benefits of their portability in accessing digitally published content. One of his books is published digitally, and three more are in the queue. Shumon expressed his broad idea about digital publishing stating the different formats and digital publishing platforms. His first project was published in Amazon Kindle in 2015, and in December 2020, a novelette was published in a digital magazine. Farjana felt optimistic about digital publishing and thought it offered a far better service than traditional publishing. She mentioned that she hadn’t yet worked with any digital publishing house but heard from her fellow authors that there was transparency on financial aspects. Chakraborty said his experience in this area was minimal. However, his books published in India are available on Amazon.

Farjana thought that digital publishing would be the first choice for any author in the upcoming future, and unfortunately none of her books had yet been digitally published. She expressed an earnest desire by saying she looked forward to it. “I think that if my books were digitally published, they would be more accessible, hence more popular. For example, often people from outside the country show interest in reading my books, but unfortunately, they can’t as they are not available in digital format which will be pretty easy to access from any corner of the world.”

Xulian thought that the idea of digital publishing in Bangladesh is dependent on the situation. The format has become popular in last 2 years and is seeing a sharp increase. However, he thought small and medium-sized books were more popular than large books in digital format. Shumon admitted that digital books are easily accessible, but he thought the crown still went to the hardcovers. Chakraborty resonated with this sentiment. He said, “Printed books are still popular and easily accessible. In our country’s context, I don’t think digital publishing has become that popular yet. There isn’t a well-established platform in place for it.”

### 3.1.3. Digital Publishing Activities in the Bangladeshi Publishing Industry

According to Shumon, the bandwidth of digital publishing in Bangladesh is still narrow. He describes the current activi-

ties in following words, “In recent years we’ve seen some platforms trying to make a move and publish authors online. Platforms such as Rokomari, Boichoi, Boitai etc are doing their best. As with many things in our country, anything trendy goes uphill. And when the hype dies down, it falls from the peak.” We asked a question to the authors if their books were available on the biggest online retailer platform Rokomari.com, and if they thought it was beneficial. Shumon further added to this question that his books were only available in Rokomari in hardcover, and not as digital copies. He said, publishers are not yet interested in publishing a book in multiple formats. “The sad truth is that you would rarely find more than one format of the same book here. People are just not yet accustomed to having several formats.”

To have a more generalized idea of how rokomari.com is different or similar to Amazon in terms of promoting digital books, we asked the opinion of authors. Farjana said rokomari has only recently introduced an e-book format while Amazon has been doing it for nearly two decades. She thought if Rokomari wanted to reach the heights of Amazon, it should include self-publishing and radically improve its marketing policy. On answering about the benefits of Rokomari, she was very upfront. To Farjana Rokomari had proven to be very beneficial and she had been on its’ bestseller list quite a few times.

Chakraborty mentioned a Bangladeshi digital publishing platform, Boitai, and said he had discussions with them, but they hadn’t worked together yet. He thought Rokomari was beneficial to both authors and readers but did not answer how it had benefitted him in terms of his book sales or reaching the target audience.

### 3.1.4. Perception of Global Accessibility

The translation is a means of global accessibility. Still, through proper distribution channels, people speaking in their native language get the opportunity to cherish literature in their own mother tongue, which always brings great experience to reading. Small nation publishing industries like Bangladesh are not especially adept in employing worldwide distribution channels, so people anywhere can easily access the physical copy of the desired book. For this problem, the prominent solution is increasing the publishing industry’s digital accessibility.

Farjana thought digital media and services like Amazon would be the best option for giving her writing worldwide exposure. As there’s no working distribution channel, she said, “Readers from outside Bangladesh have purchased my books in two ways. Either they have purchased it while they were in Bangladesh, or they have friends or online vendors to send them the books.” To make her titles globally accessible, she wants to adopt self-publishing offered by Amazon.

Xulian also thought Amazon would be the biggest asset in making his books available worldwide. He felt joyous about his recent novel Ashiyani being translated into English as it

would increase its chances among global audience. “I’ve interacted with readers outside Bangladesh multiple times, specifically in International Facebook groups. After hearing about the concept of my novel, they expressed a desire to read it. Unfortunately, language barrier was a hindrance. Now when it will be published in English, they can buy it.”

Chakraborty sounded confident about the global accessibility of his books. “Since my books are available on Amazon, they are globally accessible. Amazon provides the best reach,” he said. He also interacted with readers in the USA, India, Canada, France and Germany. Since his books published in India are available on Amazon, readers from those countries could easily buy and read them.

### 3.1.5. Inspiration for Self-Publishing

Self-publishing by Kindle direct publishing of Amazon has been very successful worldwide. We tried to extract perspectives from Bangladeshi authors about their ideas for self-publishing.

Shumon defined extensively on self-publishing and KDP. “It means you write a book, then edit yourself or hire an editor, format your book, create a cover or hire a professional, then if you think you are finished, make it available in digital platforms.” He had a clear idea about promotional facilities provided by Kobo Writing Life and KDP and also their royalty-sharing policy. Quoting on self publishing services in Bangladesh, he said, “There are several platforms that provide services for self-publication. Boichoi, Boitoy, Ridmik, Boipoka etc provides opportunity for self-publication in digital formats here.” We asked the author if he was familiar with the self-publishing process and if he ever tried self-publishing any of his books. To which he answered, “I am aware of the self-publishing process. As I mentioned, my first project was a military thriller that collaborated with another author and was published as a digital book in Amazon.” However, he was very explicit in saying that self-publishing is a hectic job. “The first problem I faced was with editing. It was hardly possible to hire a professional, so I had to do it myself. And then, I had to format the book alone. The cover was designed by my co-author. As he wasn’t a professional, he faced certain difficulties pulling that off. And after all of this came the grand finale: marketing. As a matter of fact, we terribly failed at that as we had no clue at all.”

Shumon strongly opposed the idea of self-publishing in Bangladesh at present. He gave staunch reasons for that. “The Bangladeshi book industry is very tiny. Here people prefer hardcovers to paperbacks—the priority of digital books comes after that. And if you add self-publication to that list, it becomes way too difficult to push your books toward the reader’s bookshelf. Marketing is the prime reason. The second one is based on reader’s psychology. They have a notion that self-published authors lack the skill and proficiency that a traditionally published author has. That alone puts the authors in a tight corner.”

Farjana showing a positive attitude expressed a need for

marketing or business professionals. As marketing is the primary hindrance for self-publishing, she thought the problem could be mitigated if the industry had more experts in that field. She also named a few similar self-publishing services in Bangladesh, such as, Boitoy, Boighor, StreetLib etc. Farjana differs in perspective from Shumon in regard to the demand gap for self-publishing in Bangladesh. “Yes, there is likely a demand gap for self-publishing in Bangladesh. The growing literary community, increasing internet accessibility, and cultural shift towards digital content indicate potential for self-publishing. Traditional publishing barriers and the need for diverse language and genre representation further underscore this demand. Enhanced local platforms and resources could help bridge this gap.”

Xulian answered the questions about self-publishing in retrograde. “Right now, I don’t want to publish a book by myself. I’ve gathered a handsome number of readers throughout the country. If I want to publish my book by myself, I have to look after the distribution and sale of my book. It will be a challenge for me, and I can’t handle it properly, I think.” He is not familiar with platforms like KDP, and clearly shows a lack of interest in that topic.

Reverting to Chakraborty we received cautious answers. “Self-publishing has its advantages, but it also feels risky. Managing both publishing and promotion on my own can be quite cumbersome.” Although his books are available through Amazon, he hadn’t tried self-publishing before and neither felt willing to take the opportunity if provided. Chakraborty refused to answer what discouraged him from the process, and further expressed vaguely the demand gap of self-publishing in Bangladesh. He said the lack of popularity for platforms like Amazon or KDP in Bangladesh could be an issue.

### 3.1.6. Demand of the Audiobook Industry

We asked the authors if there was a demand for audiobooks among Bangladeshi readers and received quite diverse replies.

According to Chakraborty, “Audiobooks are becoming quite popular, even in Bangladesh. One such platform that comes to mind is “Shunboi.” The demand for audiobooks is growing here.”

Shumon, having a clear idea about global and Bangladeshi audiobook industry said, “Global audiobook industry is a blooming sector now. We’ve Spotify, Amazon Audible and Google Play to publish audiobooks. The market is now worth above 5 billion dollars and still growing large. In Bangladesh...people are thrilled to see new ideas implemented. They started talking about the possibility of audiobook demands. Some platforms like Ridmik and Boichoi have audiobooks. But notable change is yet to be seen.”

Xulian said he had little idea about the popularity of audiobooks in Bangladesh, while Farjana said that the demand among new generation is showing an increase. “The demand for audiobooks among Bangladeshi readers is gradually in-



creasing. Factors contributing to this trend include the growing use of smartphones and internet access, and a busy lifestyle that makes listening more convenient than reading. However, due to the lack of proper resources, copyright issues can be seen.”

## 3.2. Findings from the Publishers Group

### 3.2.1. Use of Technology in Content Production

Technology plays an integral part in the production cycle of a company. The second level of Thompson’s topology speaks about content management and manipulation, including publishers’ role in the value creation process. This level concerns how many functions in the production, from copyediting to designing to proofreading, are outsourced to freelancers and specialized firms. Thompson argues that the key contribution of the publisher is in the acquisition, development and manipulation of content [6]. We tried to investigate if the notion is true in cases of technologically lagging publishing industries as well.

To find out how deeply technology is embedded in the production process in the Bangladeshi publishing industry, we asked the publishers specific questions about the usage of digital tools, freelancer appointments, usage of typesets, and other advanced technological equipment, like Artificial Intelligence.

The CEO of Benzene Prokashon said, that to design and format the books, the company uses software like MS Word, Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator. Printing and binding are a different industry and after formatting a book, the company hands it over to them to finish the overall process. To design, format or proofread the books, a freelancer is not always appointed. It is done chiefly by the team from the publishing house. Freelancer appointment is situation dependent. Also, Benzene has a specific Bengali typeset that they use for publishing their books, regardless of the genre. He mentioned that AI has been used for completing some tasks within the company recently, but he didn’t specify the tasks. However, he was very optimistic about the influence of AI in the publishing industry. He thought it was like a blessing. For cover design, illustration and identifying misinformation, they are already using help from AI software.

The CEO of Meera Prokashon gave a similar response in terms of technological tools usage within the company. He also specified that MS Word, Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator are widely used for any kind of design or formatting work. Freelancers are hired for only proofreading in Meera. They are paid an amount per 16 pages of proofreading, and there are selected firms that supply those people. Other works, such as designing, and formatting, are done or managed by some firms under his supervision. In some contexts, writers take upon the tasks themselves. Professionally they use a single typeset for any kind of publication from the company and according to the standard guidance from Bangla Academy, they always use Bijoy keyboard (licensed under the

Bangladesh Copyright Act 2005). The CEO strongly denied any occurrences of AI usage within the industry. Not only within his company, but he thought that other publishing houses were not interested in using AI for their works as well.

We took our third interview with the production manager of Oddhay Publication. For production purposes, digital tools like MS Word, Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator are used. They maintain quite a clear workflow within the company and hire freelancers for particular tasks. “Cover designs are done by freelancers. Once we get the manuscript of the book, we send it to the editor for editing. After it is edited and proofread, we again send it to the writer for their final approval.” For typesetting, he mentioned using Avro keyboard, the open-source Unicode typing software in Bengali for all genres of books. He expressed a sanguine perspective on the usage of AI within the publishing industry.

### 3.2.2. Online and Offline Global Distribution

When asked about distributions around the world, Benzene Prokashon said their books are available in India through many bookshops and licensed distributors. Also, some local bookstores supply books globally on demand. Almost all their books are available at Rokomari.com. They thought that in terms of marketing, sells and distribution, Rokomari plays a very effective role in Bangladesh currently.

Oddhay Publication’s books are available in Kolkata, India. An organization from there regularly visits the Bangladeshi market and works as a supplier in between both markets. Books from Oddhay are also available at Rokomari; however, the interviewee thought it was not different from traditional retailers and not that beneficial for their company.

Meera Prokashon supplies books abroad if they are requested on demand, however, not in bulk. Upon personal purchases, they find suppliers, but never engage in direct distribution. They also mentioned their books being displayed in international book fairs in Frankfurt, London, or Kolkata through various vendors. All books from Meera are available on Rokomari. The CEO of Meera told us that profit margins from Rokomari are not definite. They can retain a maximum of 10% profit per book and in some rare cases it might increase. Business with Rokomari depended chiefly on the production costs.

### 3.2.3. A Brief Comparison Between Markets in West Bengal and Bangladesh

West Bengal is a state in India which shares a border with Bangladesh in the western region. The publishing industries in Bangladesh and India are parallel to each other because of the language parity. In West Bengal reside about 100 million Bengali-speaking people. The cultural exchange between these two parts of Bengal has a very old and rich literary history. A prominent example of this is the works and songs

of prodigious Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, who was born and raised in Kolkata, but one of his songs about Bengal was later adapted as the national anthem of Bangladesh.

According to Benzene Prokashon, the distinguishing factors between the two markets are – price, supply of raw materials, book distribution, and readership. Does publishing in West Bengal influence publishing in Bangladesh in terms of digital adaptation? In response to the question, they replied, "Due to digital adaptation, readers can easily access books from Kolkata. This brings about some changes in reading habits and influences taste as well. Consequently, publishers in Bangladesh need to select book subjects that align with readers' preferences. At the same time, competition in the market is increasing, forcing publishers to bring better content. As books from Bangladesh are also reaching Kolkata, a similar effect is being felt there."

Oddhay publication, however, replied in negative. They didn't think the market of West Bengal had any influence on the Bangladeshi publishing market. Oddhay felt uncertain while comparing both markets. We stated in the methodology chapter that at the time of conducting this research, Bangladesh was going through a political crisis, which affected the geopolitics of the whole South-Asian region. In response to this question, Oddhay expressed an anxiousness about the situation. They said, it is difficult to say anything until everything is sorted.

Meera Prokashon, being an old publisher has many far and better contacts with publishers in Kolkata. Every year during the Ekushey Book Fair in February, publishers from West Bengal visit Bangladesh, they list out popular books, sign foreign publishing rights, and take some samples back for future consideration. Meera thought, not only in case of digital adaptation, but also the West Bengal publishing market influences the market of Bangladesh in a wide spectrum. There exists a keen distinguishment according to Meera. "The quality of writing or writers are better in West Bengal but the production system in Bangladesh is better than them."

### 3.2.4. An Outlook on the Audiobook Industry

Audiobooks are another format of digital publishing, and it is gaining popularity worldwide. Meera Prokashon thought in Bangladesh people are less interested in audiobooks. "Bangladesh does not have a customer base for audiobooks. Quality writers are not interested in converting their writings into audio because of copyright and infringement issues. I know there's a very limited audience for it, and mainly young and rising writers are making audiobook contracts. Probably to gain more followers."

Benzene thought, there might be an audience for audiobooks in Bangladesh, but the industry is in a primary phase. There are some YouTube channels that work professionally with Bengali audiobooks. Some organizations are working with paid versions, but they are so obscure that they are seldom known by people. They are struggling due to the lack of

listeners. Benzene further added, conversion of Bengali literature into audiobook will make it more accessible to global audience.

Oddhay said, there's a maximum of 2-5% listeners currently in Bangladesh for audiobook industry.

### 3.2.5. Publishers' Perspectives on Amazon

Amazon is the largest online retailer in the worldwide publishing industry. For people in this business, it should be rudimentary to have working knowledge about Amazon if they want to grow exponentially. We asked the publishers directly why Amazon does not have Bangladeshi books in the system. Their perspective and knowledge about Amazon were widely different from each other.

Oddhay Publication thought, the business policy of Amazon is not favorable according to Bangladesh's environment. They did not clarify further. They stated in the interview form that they did not know how publishing within Amazon works, or did not have any functional knowledge about KDP. Oddhay further sounded confident that authors do not want to risk their content with self-publishing because publishing houses can give better opportunities.

Benzene thought, the prime obstacle for Bangladeshi books not being available on Amazon is chiefly related to supply management. They said, there are no offices, or any branches of Amazon in Bangladesh and distribution is dependent on India or other countries. They as well, have no basic idea about publishing process through Amazon. But they saw self-publishing as a good opportunity for Bangladeshi writers. "It brings new content and diverse voices in market. It somehow develops the possibilities of literary market. Development of literary content is good for the development of publishing business as well."

The CEO of Meera Prokashon had zero knowledge about Amazon or any other global retailer markets. But he was extremely positive. "Meera wants to grow. And if digital publishing has better opportunities to offer for the future, Meera is willing to take it." There was an extraordinary amount of energy received from the interviewee and willingness to learn the technological proceedings was perceived. We asked if there were any facilities for publishers within the current framework to make them knowledgeable about how the publishing industry operates worldwide. Also, if there were any services available to make them technologically adept. The publisher replied in negative and said, there are no such organizations. "There's one organization, Bangladesh Pustok Prokashok O Bikreta Shomiti, but they do not have any policy for digital improvement of the publishing, and they are not much concerned about it."

### 3.2.6. Digital Marketing by Publishers

A good marketing policy is the most powerful weapon to deploy today, especially because normal people consume data, and are fed with copious information every day. Leveraging the benefits provided by algorithm marketing re-

quires the realization of what magic algorithms can do. Is the Bangladeshi publishing industry prepared to take the benefit?

We asked the interviewees simply if they used any digital marketing strategies to promote their books online. From Meera and Oddhay publication anticipated answers were received. They only used Facebook posts and sometimes boosting to promote the published books digitally. Benzene Prokashon said, that they use Facebook, Instagram, X and Google for paid and non-paid advertisements. And expressed an interest in using digital billboards sometime in future.

There is a clear difference between the views of publishers and the authors, and even the publishers do not seem to be on the same page about everything. We can perceive their zeal to learn about new technology and sense the hint of helplessness in failing to achieve that.

## 4. Discussion

Based on the findings, it is apparent that a lot of misinformation, miscommunication hovers between the relationships between author-author, author-publisher and publisher-publisher in the publishing industry of Bangladesh. Digital literacy is almost non-existent, and they hold vague ideas about the technological evolution in the industry happening in the world outside. For the ease of finding meaningful results, the discussion is divided into some subsections specifically focusing on the intervening perspectives of the interviewed stakeholders.

### 4.1. The Author↔Author Perspective

All the four authors interviewed expressed different opinions and different levels of satisfaction while working with the current publishers. Farjana faced difficulties with financial aspects, Chakraborty mentioned hardships but was not explicit about the challenges he faced, Shumon praised the new publishing houses and criticised the old ones, while the only exception was Xulian who was fully satisfied with his chosen publishers.

Farjana is the youngest of the writers among the interviewed ones. We can see that she is less experienced compared to the others in terms of negotiations. The Bangladeshi publishing industry is extremely compact and works through direct communication between author and publisher. There is no helping body as literary agents to deal with publishers on behalf of authors and look into their legal and financial formalities. To earn a living from writing in Bangladesh, an author needs to be skilled in negotiations and well-informed about legal frameworks. They also need to do research about the publishing houses and their fair practices. In a small industry, it is very much possible to sniff off the rumours, either good or bad. An example of which we can see through Xulian. He was well aware of the limitations of the industry and despite having full confidence in his writing, he waited to sign with the perfect publisher. Through writing, online and social

media he kept a hold of his loyal readers, so when his novel was finally published, it received both monetary success and acclamations. Another important thing to observe is the gender disparity. Farjana is the only female writer we have interviewed. We tried to find if any previous literature or newspaper articles were available about the gender imbalance between published male and female writers in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, no such research has been done on that subject. We then resorted to the popular author list provided by Rokomari.com, which is based on the number of followers for each author. Among the first 50 authors in the popular writing category, only two writers were females [7] and among 30 in the featured authors tab there were only two, including translations of J. K. Rowling. This statistic gives a hint that the publishing industry in Bangladesh is chiefly dominated by male and naturally they have an upper hand.

None of the authors seemed to have first-hand experience with digital publishing. They were only familiar with the concept of e-books, and in some cases, audiobooks, owing to these mediums being widely popular. However, we received answers only on the surface level about the idea or the concept. It was obvious that they trusted the local online retailer Rokomari very much and felt content with the facilities they received from Rokomari.

As for global accessibility, everyone agreed that Amazon digital publishing would be the best option for gaining global outreach. But what restricts Amazon from entering the Bangladeshi market. Although Amazon started as a bookselling company, it is now the go-to e-commerce store for anyone. From groceries to stationaries to beauty products, there is nothing that one cannot find on Amazon. When expanding their business into a new market, it is unlikely that they would agree to have only the bookselling part of it and leave out the rest. In Bangladesh, the e-commerce market is monopolized by Daraz, a concern from the Alibaba group, and except for bookselling, Daraz provides the exact facilities that Amazon does.

In Bangladesh, except for those who live in urban areas, people are still not accustomed to e-commerce services. The wide acceptance of Daraz among city dwellers makes it hard for Amazon to penetrate the market. Also, the publishing industry here is not that much appealing to businesses and Amazon would feel desperate to expand its business in this territory. It naturally begets great concern for authors in terms of global outreach. The depressing reality is authors cannot pressurise the policymakers for development of this industry and many don't have a clear idea about what kind of development they want.

About self-publishing, the authors were keenly aware of the process. However, only Farjana was interested in the possibilities self-publishing should offer. Xulian and Shumon, both experienced ones, did not think much of the promise of self-publishing, primarily because of the efforts it required. Even if designing and formatting could be managed, they were mostly concerned about the marketing aspect. Accord-



ing to them, publishing houses provided better shelter. Again, they were strictly against it because self-publishing demanded monetary involvement. If they hire freelancers for cover design, editing, proofreading or marketing, they will need to invest a sum of money to achieve desired exposure before the readers, which can be exhausting. It is ironic because the number of vanity publishers in Bangladesh is quite high, and one would be lucky to have the publisher bear all the expenses for publishing. Investing in self-publishing can be risky as well and there is no warranty for return on investment.

As for the audiobook, the authors thought there was an increased popularity for it, but the growth is really steady. We found that according to a study from Statista, Revenue in the Audiobooks market in Bangladesh is forecasted to reach US\$6.56m in 2024 and User penetration for audiobooks is set to be 4.0% in 2024 and is projected to increase to 5.0% by 2029 [8]. However, the method for obtaining the data is not disclosed on the website.

## 4.2. The Publisher↔Publisher Perspective

The study from Antonio Córdón-García et al. shows that the presence of big online bookstores for e-book such as Amazon, Apple, Barnes and Noble, and Google in Spain has forced local publishers to adapt and take up digital publishing. This study suggests that traditional publishers had to migrate into digital publishing to rejuvenate their business. This shift also increased the number of digital publishers in the market. This study is indicative that in a way, the appearance of a big digital market had compelled the industry to redefine its strategy for survival [9]. Hence, the digital publishing market in Spain saw growth in the subsequent years.

However, the most immediate and frequent impact of technology is identifiable in editing and designing books in the publishing industry. Bangladesh is lagging far behind in this race. To write, format, edit and typeset Microsoft Word is used, which is widely replaced by the software, Adobe InDesign, for its advanced feature for printing press. “InDesign specializes in long and text-heavy documents, which makes it ideal for creating the interiors of books with hundreds (or even thousands) of pages” [10]. The specialty of InDesign is in its power to use different, attractive typesetting and create an alluring book interior. Attributes which do not exist in titles published by Bangladeshi publishers. For example, let us compare two children’s fiction writers, the worldwide popular David Williams and another from Meera Prokashon, Sadia Chowdhury Porag. Both write brilliant content, but the former has a dedicated team of only designers whose job is to make the books beautiful and eye-catching. We could easily identify at least 10 different typefaces in each of David Williams’s books. Not even 2% of that effort is made for the books of the latter writer.

The publishers use a single house style typeface for books across all genres and there are minimal to no interior designs involved. So, they are heavily reliant on the only

word-processing software they know. The unwillingness to explore and a limited scope for exploration go hand in hand among the publishers of the Bangladeshi publishing industry. It is anyway hopeful news that all the publishers we interviewed, mentioned using Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator for designing a good book cover, but the culture for hiring freelancers who are experts in this art is yet to be realized.

As for the distribution of books, there is no structured channel for global distribution. The e-commerce site Rokomari has certainly increased the sales of the books. Rokomari has resuscitated the Bangladeshi publishing industry in a sense. It was established in 2012, and before this platform, the publishers could only sell books during the Ekushey Book Fair every year in February. The sale was otherwise minimal throughout the year. Only recently Rokomari has made e-books available in their platform, which can be a precursor to establishing finally a worldwide market for Bangladeshi books. Rokomari has also employed DRM (Digital Rights Management) protection for their e-books to protect them from piracy and infringement. This way, the e-books can only be read through the Rokomari app or while on their website.

West Bengal, or precisely Kolkata is in a much advantageous position in terms of global reach. Chinese companies and products are largely banned in India and the e-commerce market there is dominated by Amazon. Some publishers feel confident about the continual of good communication perhaps because of a long history of shared brotherhood. Like Meera, old publishing houses are rich with backlist titles, some of which hold demand over time. But recent publishers, like Oddhay, did not have the resources and neither got the time and opportunity to build relations across the border. Worldwide digital penetration thus has become tougher for new publishing houses.

Shunboi, the audiobook startup established in 2021 has made a remarkable feat in the audiobook industry in Bangladesh. “Within three months of our debut, we had listeners from 45 countries, with an engagement rate of 12 minutes and 33 seconds per session,” said one of the co-founders of the platform Shahriar Hridoy [11]. The mutual statement received from the publishers, that audiobook listeners are scarce in number in Bangladesh, seems to be based on their reliance rather than fact-based information.

The publishers agreed unanimously that Amazon is the best possible option for global outreach, but none of them gave a clear answer as to why the platform is not available in Bangladesh. Benzene Prokashon tried to state that there is no office or branch of Amazon in Bangladesh, but they cautiously avoided the answer to the question Why. It might be a reason that the answer is not straightforward and hugely based on the political strata.

Finally, it seemed the publishers were using the Facebook and Instagram algorithms for targeted marketing. However, Social media marketing only includes one variety among many of digital marketing. Accomplished publishers use email marketing, content marketing and sometimes search



engine optimization to attain better exposure to their products. Nowadays, every affluent publisher has a dedicated marketing team that builds up strategies not only for offline but also online marketing. To have a specialized marketing team for a small publisher in Bangladesh may be extravagant, but here we again need to discuss the necessity of freelancers. Around 65,000 freelancers from Bangladesh work in the IT sector, and they provide various services to clients abroad, including digital marketing. Small indie publishers are self-publishers who often hire these freelancers to market their products. There is a skilled workforce in this sector in Bangladesh and publishers should endeavor to look for such talents.

### 4.3. The Author↔ Publisher Perspective

The publishers we interviewed were not at all concerned about the increased use of AI in the narrative world. Moreover, the publisher from Benzene Prokashon said they were using the AI for various tasks within the company. Also, our author group was confident about the industry's transparency about AI use. They all agreed that AI could be used for research on a specific topic, but AI writing had not yet occurred in book publishing.

As presumably we stated self-publishing is seen as an opportunity for writers, but most of our authors spoke against it. They are not prepared to tackle the responsibilities of producing their books, as they understand well it is not their job. One author even said, if they self-published their books, it would mean their works are the lowest in quality. Mirroring the sentiment from the publisher of Meera Prokashon, who thought the quality of writing among youth was already in decline. Self-publishing would mean that they had been rejected by the publishers and had no way except to publish their own books.

We know for a fact that, author Rie Kudan, won Japan's most prestigious literary award for her novel, a small portion of which is written by generative AI [12]. According to a report from June 2023 from the University of Glasgow, "Indie Authors Earnings 2023 found that the average incomes of self-published authors are rising, with a 53% increase in 2022 over the previous year. The median revenue in 2022 for self-published (indie) authors was US\$12,749" [13]. The Wordsrated website said, "The number of self-published books has increased by 264% in the last five years" [14]. But as we discussed previously, self-publishing in Bangladesh is largely dependent on the appearance of Amazon in Bangladeshi market. And as long as KDP is not open for the Bangladeshi writers, it is hard for them to navigate the market of self-publishing.

Nonetheless, for now, the author and publishers of Bangladeshi publishing industry are in a ubiquitous agreement here.

What they disagreed on seemed to be a qualitative argument. Meera Prokashon, being an age-old publisher and having worked with numerous academics in the country, can

see less value and promise in the writing of the new generation. The publisher reverberated the opinions as a spokesperson from the old traditional publishing houses. The language and expressions used by the new authors seem foreign and don't reflect the Bengali identity. The publisher talked about *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy and how miraculously the book invests in its language. Books like that which invest in the tradition of Bengali language and culture are not seen nowadays in Bengali literature.

On the other hand, an author we interviewed blamed the old publishing houses for ruining the reputation of the industry. We found that there are not enough services available to help the authors improve their quality of writing and to help the publishers by exposing them to digital revolutions in publishing. Both groups are in need of expert assistance who can facilitate a successful publishing industry in Bangladesh.

## 5. Conclusion

It can be stated that the publishing industry of Bangladesh has been grappling with too many problems to fully realise technological adaptation and potential globalization of Bangladeshi content. Geopolitical influence, lack of technology resources, lack of interest in technological adaptation in selective stakeholders, knowledge gap, lack of diversity, and inefficient transparency between authors and publishers are a few factors which have been dragging the problems within the industry as a whole.

If the role of an author is pivotal for social conditioning [15], then all the other elements that help a writer's journey of resurrection as an author, are similarly important in cultivating the social conscious. An author can only play the effective role of a changemaker if they have the capacity to reach the desired and required tools which aid them in expressing their ideology. Today, our ideologies have become so advanced, that the responsibility of social conditioning does not only rest upon the shoulders of the authors. It is the duty of the publishers to introduce innovative mediums and encourage young writers to participate more in globalized content creation.

It provides a good indication that young people are engaging in publishing entrepreneurship, and we can certainly hope that their endeavors will bring about positive changes. However, these efforts will meet the desired goals if only the potential is cultivated properly. The real world seldom sees a hero like a helmsman for guiding a ship in favour of the wind, but it is collective effort and willingness to prosper that shines a light on the dark nights.

## Abbreviations

KDP      Kindle Direct Publishing

## Author Contributions

Tanha Tarannum is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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