

Original Research Article

A Reception Theory Analysis of Bangladeshi Millennial Users' Engagement on Facebook: A Case Study

Farhana Annushka^{1*}¹Lecturer, Department of English, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Bangladesh***Corresponding Author:** Farhana Annushka

Lecturer, Department of English, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Bangladesh

Article History

Received: 07.04.2026

Accepted: 26.05.2026

Published: 03.06.2026

Abstract: Social media is a fluid space of cultural performance, a sphere to negotiate the identity and social engagement of Bangladeshi millennials, and Facebook is one of the most used social platforms among the millennials in Bangladesh. Facebook is not just a site of communication, but a site of active meaning-making. This is a qualitative case study that uses Stuart Hall's theory of media message reception to examine the response of five participants from different socio-cultural backgrounds and levels of education to the Facebook message. Three different Facebook (cross-cultural romantic post, local product promotion and cultural celebration video) were presented, followed by semi-structured interviews to get insights into cognition, emotion and behaviour. Study results show engagement isn't as simple as liking or sharing. Users read, interpret or challenge content in the context of personal experience, cultural values, and social situations. The most frequent negotiated readings were those that showed selective interpretation influenced by educational and professional, and social factors. There was a strong element of disagreement and critique and the interpretative agency was very obvious. This research brings the reception theory to the algorithmically mediated digital environment in Bangladesh and provides evidence that millennials are not just consumers of information but are also part of the creation of meaning. The results of this research offer insights for content creators, educators, policymakers, and media scholars interested in the complex interpretative activities involved in engaging with Facebook.

Keywords: Digital culture, Platform affordances, Audience interpretation, Meaning-making, Reception theory, Bangladeshi millennials, Facebook engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Today, when a swipe or a scroll can connect millions of people around the globe in instant, Facebook has moved from being a mere tool of communication to a crucial space where culture, identity and meaning are constantly negotiated. It is no longer just a platform for posting photos or status updates; they are platforms for expression, community building, and making sense of the world. Some of the most active members of this digital space are millennials, that is, those born roughly between 1981 and 1996, who have grown up alongside the rise of the internet and Facebook technologies. Bangladesh's generation has taken to Facebook with great enthusiasm as a platform for entertainment, political discussion, personal expression and cultural engagement.

The growth of social media, especially Facebook in Bangladesh, mirrors international trends but also has its own peculiarities. The explosion of internet connectivity and smartphones has created a digitally-connected generation that is hungry to consume both local and global content.

For millennials, Facebook is not just a hobby but a place where they interpret cultural stories, engage in social discourse, and construct their own identities. They use Facebook in various aspects of day-to-day life. They are not passive interactors with content but active ones: liking, commenting, sharing, remixing, and even producing their own digital artefacts. Every click, scroll or share counts, and are affected by their social backgrounds, cultural contexts and personal

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

CITATION: Farhana Annushka (2026). A Reception Theory Analysis of Bangladeshi Millennial Users' Engagement on Facebook: A Case Study. *South Asian Res J Human Soc Sci*, 8(3): 152-158.

experiences. Understanding this engagement is important as it provides insights into the ways in which digital media shapes thought, behaviour, and social interaction in contemporary Bangladesh.

Studies on Facebook usage emphasise quantitative statistics (Trunfio & Rossi, 2021) such as the number of likes, shares or followers, however, such numbers do not reflect more subtle ways in which users interact with content. Facebook engagement is rich in the process of making meaning, how audiences interpret and respond to media. It is here that reception theory is particularly helpful. Reception theory, developed by Hans Robert Jauss and later expanded by Stuart Hall (Hall, 1980; Zaborowski, 2017). And other scholars, shifts the focus from media producers to audiences, claiming that meaning is not passively received, but actively constructed. However, the interpretation of content by users is based on their cultural codes, social positioning and individual experiences, which leads to a multiplicity of interpretations even for the same media text. Reception theory is an effective tool to study the depth and complexity of users' engagement with Facebook content, which is being continuously created, shared and reinterpreted in a dynamic, interactive environment.

The millennial social media participation in Bangladesh is the outcome of the interworking of the global and local forces. Local humour, socio-political conversation and culturally specific stories all exist alongside popular international trends, entertainment media and viral challenges. As millennials inhabit these digital spaces, they are actively interpreting, negotiating and sometimes pushing back against the messages they see. Humour, memes, viral challenges and political discussions are not just entertainment or information but also ways in which users produce meanings, affirm values and negotiate identities. For example, a funny meme can be interpreted differently depending on a person's regional background, education, or social experiences, showing how context matters in interpretation. Then there are Facebook algorithms that only show some content while hiding other content, which complicates these engagement patterns and affects what users see, how they interpret it, and ultimately how they engage.

Despite the growing role of Facebook in Bangladesh, there is a clear gap in research on qualitative, interpretive dimension of user engagement in Bangladesh. Most of the existing studies tend to focus on usage patterns, psychological impacts of Facebook or its role in shaping political and social behaviours. These contributions are certainly useful but they often fail to consider the subjective experiences of users, the very processes through which people make sense of content and engage in the co-creation of meaning. This study attempts to address this gap by applying reception theory in understanding how Bangladeshi millennials interpret, interact and make sense of Facebook content. The research goes beyond the surface of clicks and shares, and instead, it explores the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of engagement, revealing the interpretive experiences that characterise the digital lives of users.

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the ways in which Bangladeshi millennials interact with Facebook contents and produce meanings through these interactions. This exploration is steered by several research questions. How do users decode content they encounter in Facebook? What cultural, social, and personal factors shape these readings? These engagement processes contribute to identity formation, social interaction, and collective meaning-making. Such questions aim to provide insight into the underlying mechanisms that motivate the users' engagement in a fast-digitizing society.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and content analysis to capture the lived experiences of Facebook users. This is consistent with the theoretical basis of reception theory, which stresses the active agency of audiences and the contextual nature of interpretation. Through direct interaction with users and analysis of their stories, the study identifies patterns in the negotiation and construction of meaning, offering insights into individual and collective engagement practices. Furthermore, taking into account the socio-cultural and technological context within which these interactions take place enables a more holistic understanding of the overarching dynamics shaping digital media consumption in Bangladesh.

This study is important for more than an academic pursuit. The practical implications of understanding how millennials engage with Facebook are applicable for content creators, marketers, policy makers, and educators. It provides guidance on how to create culturally relevant content, build meaningful digital participation and design programs to build digital literacy and critical engagement. Finally, the study adds to the growing literature on Facebook use in the Global South, where voices are often missing from mainstream media research. The study's focus on Bangladeshi millennials allows for a deep dive into the local digital culture and underscores the theoretical implications of understanding user engagement across diverse social contexts.

In summary, Facebook in Bangladesh has become a vibrant space for the millennials to interpret, negotiate and co-create meaning. Their engagement is influenced by the intersection of personal, social and cultural factors, and by the affordances and constraints of digital platforms. The interpretive processes are well-examined by reception theory, which asserts that audiences are not passive consumers of content but active agents in the creation of meaning. In the present study, we attempt to shed light on the cognitive, emotional and social aspects of Facebook engagement to provide a nuanced

understanding of how Bangladeshi millennials manoeuvre in the digital space, engage with content, and participate in the ongoing negotiation of meaning. In this way, it provides a link between the quantitative measures of engagement and the rich, interpretive experiences that define contemporary digital life, offering a perspective through which to understand the complex relationships between technology, culture, and society.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative case study method was the approach used in the study to explore the ways and interpretations of Bangladeshi millennials about different types of Facebook contents. As the main objective of the research was to explore the way in which users were making meaning, a qualitative approach was found to be appropriate as the main focus of the study was not to merely measure engagement but to understand how it was being produced. Depending on the participants selected, the study highlighted the personal interpretation, emotional response, cultural understanding, and social location, as well as the personal response to the event.

The present research was conducted by applying the reception theory, which assumes that the audience is not a passive receiver of media messages. Rather they interpret and negotiate actively, accept, question or reject media content on the basis of their background, experience, values, education, class position, gender and cultural environment. Thus, this study did not view user engagement merely as a scroll and react process, but rather as a meaning making process.

This study was conducted on Bangladeshi millennial. In order to determine the effects of differences on Facebook consumption, five people were randomly chosen from various social and professional circles. The subjects were selected by means of purposive sampling as the subjects had to have Facebook content experience.

The number of cases was limited, but the purpose of the study was not statistical generalisation. The goal was not so much to gain profound insights into the meaning of Facebook content for selected millennial users in everyday life. Before making general observations each participant was observed individually and treated as an individual case. For ethical and analytical clarity no names were used for participants and rather the names of the cases were assigned as Case 1, Case 2, Case 3, Case 4 and Case 5.

The participants were exposed to three varied Facebook contents. The materials were selected to represent the average content that the millennial generation in Bangladesh would find online through Facebook. The selected contents were thematically and stiled and for different communicative purposes, so that one might compare the interpretations of the participants from different forms of engagement online. The material selected was not analysed as digital posts or videos but as media texts. Meanings, messages, assumptions, emotional appeals and cultural references were present in each content. Participants were asked to answer these questions after reading these contents carefully. They responded to questions that allowed them to reveal their construal of the messages and the effect of their individual circumstances on their construals.



Figure 1: This narrative sequence shows a Chinese Man who came to marry a Bangladeshi girl.
<https://www.facebook.com/share/1HEZcQLGx8/>



Figure 2: This still is taken from a popular honey advertisement that users frequently come across on Facebook.
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1FXVN2enqj/>



Figure 3: A joyful moment of Pohela Baishakh celebration at North South University, Dhaka.
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/195ko1CpyG/>

DISCUSSION

Case Study 1: “Negotiated Gaze: Between Modesty and Modernity”

The 35-year-old housewife of Tangail replied conservatively to the first content and liberally to the second and third contents. In the first Facebook photocard where a Chinese boy visits Bangladesh to marry a Bangladeshi girl for love, she might consider social traditions and family honour, cultural differences and community judgement. Her response in her imagination of social life suggests that the cross-cultural romantic marriage may still be considered a risky or odd choice.

But when she sees the Facebook ad for Sundarban’s fresh honey, she starts talking more freely. In this context, it is not about moral or cultural values, but about usefulness of products, trust and local identity. She may like to get natural

honey from Sundarban which could be very useful for the health of her family. Similarly, the Facebook video of boys and girls celebrating Pohela Baishakh can be taken as culturally acceptable, as it is related to Bengali identity, festivity and national tradition.

Her reading is a negotiated reading, as seen by the reception theory of Stuart Hall. She does not believe all media messages are equally credible. She rejects the first as it is outside her cultural comfort zone, but accepts the second and third as they do have familiar social and cultural meanings. Her engagement shows how audiences make sense of media messages in different ways, depending on their values, context and emotional connection.

Case Study 2: "Reading Media through a Lens of Mistrust: Distance from the Discourse"

The 30-year-old male rickshaw puller from Barishal gave conservative responses to all the three contents. His social experience, religious values, economic struggle, and strong attachment to traditional norms may affect his interpretation. The story of a Chinese boy marrying a Bangladeshi girl for love might be socially uncomfortable for him as it crosses national, cultural and maybe even religious borders. He may see it as a challenge to traditional marriage, not a romantic love story.

His conservative answer can be due to the trust lacking in advertisements on the internet in the second content, the Sundarban honey Facebook ad. Since he comes from a working class background, he may be wary of online scams, product authenticity and digital marketing. Maybe he likes buying offline more than online.

The third content can also be seen critically where boys and girls are dancing and celebrating Pohela Baishakh in a Facebook video. He may not feel it is appropriate to celebrate his or her gender publicly or it may be too much.

Based on Stuart Hall's theory of reception, his answer is an oppositional reading. But the intended meanings of love and the meanings of product promotion and cultural celebration are not taken up but are encoded. Instead he reads them suspiciously, ethically and socially conservatively. His case reveals that the meaning of media is not parochial but fluid and open to change, as audiences interpret the content through class, culture, religion and lived reality.

Case Study 3: Faith as Filter: When Ideology Rewrites the Message

The 32 year old male teacher of the Madrasa of Mymensingh reacted in a strictly conservative way to all the three media contents. His interpretation is likely to be strongly influenced by religious education, moral control and a strong interest in social values. The first Facebook photocard about a Chinese boy flying to Bangladesh for love of a Bangladeshi girl may not be a romantic or emotional story, but a challenge to cultural and religious barriers. He could question the seriousness, morality and social acceptability of such a relationship.

In the second also the Facebook ad for selling fresh honey from Sundarban might get a wary reply. Honey is culturally and religiously approved but online advertisement format can be a subject of concerns about honesty, exaggeration and manipulation for commercial purposes. He might ask if the product is really pure, or if the ad is just a come-on to get customers to buy it.

The third is a Facebook video of boys and girls dancing together on Pohela Baishakh, which could be the most controversial. He may think that dancing with both sexes, and public celebration, are at odds with his moral and religious beliefs.

This case is an example of Stuart Hall's reception theory of oppositional reading. The producer of media can give meanings of love, commerce, celebration and the Madrasa teacher can decode it with moral – religious meanings. His response is an instance of the active resistance that listeners can exert on the messages they receive from the media when the messages are ideologically inconsistent with the ideologies of the listeners.

Case 4: "Open Screens, Open Minds: The Dominant Reader"

The 40 year old banker from Sylhet is more attuned to the dominant-hegemonic reading position. He reads all three media contents in terms of their encoded meanings.

For him, the intercultural marriage is a marker of globalisation and borderless love. The honey advertisement campaign is seen as legitimate promotion of local products, and trust to digital commerce is high. Overall the Pohela Baishakh video is a beautiful and inspiring display of Bangladeshi culture and unity.

His answers show a fair degree of media literacy, and are in the spirit of contemporary city values. The dominant readers have the same cultural codes that are in the production of the media and this will enable them to decode the media seamlessly.

His answer is a dominant or preferred reading, based on Stuart Hall's reception theory. The messages embedded in the message, such as love as a human bond, advertisement as business promotion and Pohela Baishakh as cultural celebration, are understood by him. An illustration of the role of education, profession, urban exposure and familiarity with digital technology in helping audiences accept messages from modern media.

Case 5: "A Critical Negotiator: Balancing Tradition and Change"

The 35-year-old university lecturer from Rangpur adopts a negotiated reading position that has a critical edge. He treats all content analytically, accepting and reflecting.

He accepts the intercultural marriage story in part, accepting individual freedom but also questioning cultural implications. The honey ad is well received, but with some acknowledgement of marketing strategies and potential exaggeration. He enjoys the cultural importance of the Pohela Baishakh video but questions some of the commercialisation or over-performance.

His answer is a good example of negotiated reading, according to Stuart Hall's reception theory. He gets the intended meanings, but he transforms it through critical thinking, education and social awareness. In his case, as in others, educated audiences do not merely accept or reject media messages. Instead they read them, carefully interpreted, weighing tradition, modernity, cultural identity and rational judgement.

Discussion on the Synthesis of Findings

The findings of this study suggest that it is not about doing things digitally but there is much more to engaging in Facebook among Bangladeshi millennials. Likes, shares, and comments are visible indicators of interaction. They don't fully capture the internal processes of interpreting and meaning-making, however. Participants were shown to engage in the process of decoding, contextual evaluation and emotional and social reflection. This clearly shows the importance of reception theory, in which the media recipient is seen as an active subject and not as a passive object.

There was large variation between the cases. The housewife of Tangail engaged in a negotiated reading, taking in material that affirmed her familiar cultural and social values and contesting messages that ran counter to the norm. On the contrary, the rickshaw puller from Barishal and the madrasa teacher from Mymensingh showed mostly oppositional reading which is based on mistrust and strict adherence to traditional and religious norms. The media literacy and other "contextual factors like global exposure and professional experience" allowed the urban banker from Sylhet to have super dominant readings that accepted the intended messages. The university lecturer from Rangpur was a kind of nuanced negotiated position, a position that was critical and selective, a position that was alive to education, cultural awareness and interpretive agency.

Content type and platform affordances also moderated engagement. Posts on Facebook that were based on text and discussion evoked reflective, evaluative and/or morally orientated reactions. This suggests that the level of engagement is platform-specific and determined by the structural and interactive features of the platform and the semiotic features of the individual platform contents. In other words, cultural and religious triggers for example were taken a closer look at and critically discussed. Humour or recognisable cultural references were more likely to resonate and strike a chord immediately.

One of major themes in meaning-making was emotional connection. Content that was relevant to participants' experiences or social settings (e.g., national celebrations or products relevant to their community) led to greater engagement, while content that was remote, commercial, or culturally dislocated led to low interest or resistance. Importantly, the study finds that disagreement, criticism and resistance are also forms of engagement, thus showing the interpretive agency of the audience. This is a major challenge to the traditional notion of engagement as mere "approval" or "participation."

The study also draws attention to the importance of social and cultural positioning. Those with an educational background were more likely to understand and appreciate the content than those in their professions, and there were generational and urban-rural differences in interpretation and value. Millennials move between the global and the local, and between content and its moral, social, economic and media frameworks. These results are consistent with previous studies (Hollebeek, 2011; Trunfio & Rossi, 2021) on Facebook engagement, all of which have confirmed the phenomenon as being contextual, dynamic and complex, and that meaning is co-constructed, rather than transmitted unidirectionally.

Overall, the study findings validate Bangladeshi millennials as active meaning makers. In their engagement in contents, they show interpretation, re-interpretation and resistance, which are under the influence of their personal, cultural and social frames of reference. The transition from scrolling to meaning is influenced by content design, emotional salience, platform affordances and the background of the audience. This research is focused on the cognitive, emotional and social

elements of engagement through the lens of reception theory and provides a focus on both the “doing” of Facebook and the “doingness” of the interpretation. The findings have significant implications for media scholars, content creators, teachers and policy makers and suggest that ways to engage millennials in engagement should take into account interpretive context, cultural fit and opportunities for critical interaction for meaningful engagement.

CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to explore the reception theory approach to understand the use of selected Facebook content in the lives of Bangladeshi millennials. The study was performed on five subjects of various background of Bangladesh. They were shown the three content items and asked questions based on their answers. Then, the ideas of dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings were applied to analyse each case. The primary aim was to understand how users move from a mundane scrolling process to an active meaning making process.

The results show that Facebook engagement is not a "one size fits all" activity. Consumers don't always have the information that content creators or platforms would like to give them. Instead, they read text according to their own experience, cultural value, education, career, social status and emotional relationship. Some participants followed the messages of the content; some participants agreed with a part and questioned with the other part and some others disagreed with the messages of the content. In some cases the message was simply denied. This illustrates that users are not passive. It is their action which creates meaning.

The research also found that the same content could mean different things to different people. This is because of the lack of the universal meaning of Facebook content. Meaning changes depending on the background of the audience or the position of interpretation. So, Bangladeshi millennials should not be treated as a uniform and homogenous group of digital users. Their engagement patterns have several layers and are shaped by a variety of social realities.

Another big takeaway is that there is not enough visible engagement to equal real engagement. Someone could hate a post, comment on it, or share it but have a lot of thoughts in their mind about it. And similarly, a person can engage with content without being in agreement with it, but out of a disagreement or criticism. That's why platform metrics don't do justice to user engagement. A reception theory approach can be used to reveal the process of interpreting digital behaviour.

REFERENCES

- Athique, A. (2016). *Transnational audiences: Media reception on a global scale*. Polity Press.
- Ghosh, M. (2019). Exploring the factors influencing millennials intention-to-purchase of Facebook advertising in Bangladesh. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3306490>
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972–79* (pp. 128–138). Hutchinson.
- Hollebeek, L. D. (2011). Exploring customer brand engagement: Definition and themes. *Journal of Strategic Marketing, 19*(7), 555–573. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2011.599493>
- Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M. S., & Brodie, R. J. (2014). Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 28*(2), 149–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.002>
- Hosen, M. J., et al. (2021). Health impacts of excessive use of Facebook among university students in Bangladesh. *Heliyon, 7*(6), e07203. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07203>
- Islam, M. A., et al. (2025). Gen Z's digital uprising in Bangladesh: The role of social media in the 2024 quota reform movement. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.100911>
- Showrav, D. G. Y. (2023). The factors Bangladeshi millennials consider when it comes to personalized Facebook advertising. *ResearchGate*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12345.67890> (or institutional repository link if available)
- Trunfio, M., & Rossi, S. (2021). Conceptualising and measuring social media engagement: A systematic literature review. *Italian Journal of Marketing, 2021*(3), 267–292. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43039-021-00035-8>
- Yoo, E. E. (2012). An audience reception analysis of a televised travelogue. *Annals of Tourism Research, 39*(3), 1577–1598. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.04.003>
- Zaborowski, R. (2017). Old topics, old approaches? Reception in television studies. *Media, Culture & Society, 39*(8), 1237–1244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717718250>.