REVISITING CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION IN TELEVISION

Implications for Digital Media Rights in Bangladesh

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Introduction

In the contemporary discussions on children and media, participation is central to any understanding of materialising children’s communication rights. An obvious reference in this regard is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that strongly suggests the centrality of the child’s participation in media, as well as non-negotiable child rights to mass media and appropriate information. The Convention also enunciates the responsibilities of the State parties to recognise the right, and, in spirit, calls for facilitating child participation in the media. In legacy media, children in general are recipients of media outputs, but not active participants in broadcasting processes. In most parts of the world they are not consulted in decision-making or production process of television programmes that are designed, produced, and disseminated for children or in the name of children. The setting of the study reported here is Bangladesh, a South-Asian country where, in spite of some infrequent attempts to promote active child participation in broadcasting, TV programming by children or with their active participation is not yet a regular practice.

This chapter analyses the current state of and challenges to children’s participation in TV programming, referring to UNCRC articles (UN, 1989) on children’s media rights, such as Article 12 (on the child’s opinion) and 13 (on freedom of expression) that together underscore children’s rights to participate in the media, and Article 17 which is related to their access to mass media. This is an outcome of a qualitative study that examines the degree of children’s participation in TV shows that are produced for children. From the perspective of the UNCRC, this analysis has identified the challenges to children’s access to and participation in TV channels. This involves a reference to the provisions in the Convention that are related to ‘participation’ and ‘media’, which, in addition to the above-mentioned aspects, aim to protect the right to privacy and enable access to appropriate media and information.

The programmes were chosen from four TV channels including the state-run national TV, Bangladesh Television (BTV). While the chapter identifies the challenges to implementing the active participation of children in television as legacy media, subsequently it discusses the relevance of access and participation, that is, implications of the UNCRC articles for children’s
digital media rights. Considering the temporal value and evolving characteristics, the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘legacy’ have been used interchangeably for television.

**Context of Children’s Participation in Television**

In spite of recent proliferation of the internet and digital technologies, traditional TV broadcasting still plays significant roles in the shaping of lived culture and setting socio-political agendas. Historically, the state-owned BTV has produced numerous programmes for children, but mostly without direct participation of children. Recently, with the support of UN organisations and international non-governmental organisations (INGO), a few TV channels are producing children’s shows incorporating some aspects of participation. However, both the government and private TV channels demonstrate the non-participatory characteristics of legacy media. At the same time, they carry patterns of traditional media that provide limited and occasional scope for children to participate in some form.

**An Overview of Children’s TV Programmes**

Broadly, children’s TV programmes on Bangladeshi channels can be categorised as news, educational, cultural, and entertainment-oriented. In addition, there are programmes focusing on child rights. News bulletins include items like field reporting and interviews. Other programmes include drama and puppet shows, music tutorials, children’s magazines, Moncho Natok (stage drama), campus shows, quizzes, specialised shows for pre-schoolers, etc. Rights-based shows include issues of child development, education, safety and protection, and adolescent health. Usually, such programmes are supported by UN agencies and INGOs. Except for a very few programmes, they are planned and produced by adults for children. Children merely appear in the scripted shows or take part as performers or presenters. Only four programmes over the last half a decade could be identified that enabled a greater level of participation of children, in which they were involved in major stages of planning and production, as well as broadcasting.

Concerning the content, an editor and producer of children’s participatory video and TV programmes, Fahmidul Shantanu, says:

> Overall content of the children’s programmes on Bangladeshi TV channels do not reflect the necessary standards. In addition, producers in general are not familiar with the standards, varieties and elements of children’s programmes. This has resulted in the confinement of children’s programmes within a few typical categories.  
>
>(Interview, 2018)

The programmes are usually scheduled for broadcasting as weekly, fortnightly, or monthly. Over the last five years some shows for children were short-lived, while the remainder were discontinued due to funding constraints. Commenting on the down side of the externally funded children’s programmes, a retired senior member of staff (the person wishes to remain anonymous) of BTV says:

> In the case of most of the externally funded children’s programmes, when the funding period is over, the shows become irregular and are eventually discontinued. Both the state and private broadcasters should have an obligation to produce quality programmes for children and also to broadcast them regularly.  
>
>(Interview, 2018)
This former BTV official also thinks that the state TV should aim more at serving children’s media needs than simply increasing the number of programmes. BTV used to broadcast an interview-based show, *Amader Kotha* (Our Story), in which renowned personalities including politicians appeared and children questioned them about their life and work. Another show, *Shishur Chokhe* (Through the Eyes of the Child), a one-minute news bite, was broadcast by a private TV channel, ATN Bangla. The show was discontinued in 2017. *Shishur Chokhe* was a children-led programme that allowed children to participate actively in the programming processes. United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Bangladesh signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with four TV channels first in 2011 (“4 TVs to air”, 2011) and again with five channels in 2017 (“Five more”, 2017) agreeing to broadcast a one-minute segment for children at prime time on any topic related to children’s welfare and development.

## Roles of UN Organisations and INGOs

Few UN organisations and INGOs have been supporting and partnering with both the state broadcaster and private TV channels to promote children’s TV programmes in order to encourage active participation of children. In 2018, BTV along with two private TV channels launched a show, *Icche Dana* (Wings of Wishes), targeting adolescents. It is a joint effort of the Bangladesh Government’s Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, the Ministry of Information, UNICEF, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). In the late 1990s, UNICEF and Save the Children Sweden–Denmark supported a fully-flanked child-led TV show, *Mukto Khobor* (Free News), on Ekushey TV (ETV), the country’s first private TV with terrestrial coverage. The programme involved children in all stages of planning, production, and dissemination. Children as reporters collected information from the field, conducted interviews, and wrote news scripts. They were also consulted by the video editor before final editing of news footage.

ETV’s terrestrial broadcasting was shut down in 2002 as it lost a court battle over its license. After the channel had lost its terrestrial facility, it continued operation through satellite broadcasting. However, the country’s first child-led and participatory news bulletin *Mukto Khobor* went off air in December 2017. A producer of the show, who does not wish to disclose their name, tells us:

> It was one of the most popular shows on our channel. As our contract with UNICEF ended, we received no other funding for running the programme. The channel authority decided to discontinue the bulletin as they were unable to fund it from their own source.

*(Interview, 2018)*

In contrast, ATN Bangla, the first private satellite TV channel of the country, has been financing on its own a child-led news bulletin (similar to *Mukto Khobor*) called *Amra Korbo Joy* (We Shall Overcome) since 2003. In addition, the private TV channel is running five other shows for children.

## Children’s Right to Participate in Media

According to Thorfinn (2002), the relationship between children and media is, in an international and legal context, “revolving around three Ps, namely Protection, Provision and Participation. Or expressed differently, in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC articles 12, 13, 16 and 17” (p. 7). According to Article 12, it is expected that:
States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

(UN, 1989)

Article 13 is somewhat linked to Article 12. It emphasises freedom of expression, as it states that the child shall have (subject to certain restrictions if deemed to be necessary) the right to:

freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.

(UN, 1989)

UNICEF summarises the entire Article 13 as follows:

Children have the right to get and share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or others. In exercising the right to freedom of expression, children have the responsibility to also respect the rights, freedom and reputations of others. The freedom of expression includes the right to share information in any way they choose, including by talking, drawing or writing.

(UNICEF, n.d.)

Article 17, according to Thorfinn (2002), is “perhaps the most central but also the most open ended article” (p. 8), regulating children’s access to information and media which are most appropriate to them, calls the State Parties to recognise the:

important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

(UN, 1989)

Through this article, the Convention also aims that States Parties shall “encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29” (UN, 1989), as well as “encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18” (UN, 1989). Article 29 refers to Goals of Education and Article 18 refers to Parental Responsibilities and State Assistance.

‘Participation’- and ‘media’-related CRC articles referred to thus far are interconnected and have threads to some other articles. Arguably, Articles 12, 13, and 17 along with Articles 8 (Protection and Preservation of Identity) and 16 (Right to Privacy), and Article 31 (Leisure, Play, and Culture), are also relevant to an understanding of children’s right to mass media, and, in particular, their right to participation in both legacy media and the new media.

Methodology

Focus group discussions were conducted with the children who were involved in children’s TV programmes in any capacity. Altogether, 70 children aged between 8 and 12 and 14 to 16 years
old took part in separately held focus group discussions. Sixty per cent of the participants were girls. The children who participated in the child-led shows were interviewed as were those who attended TV shows for children as presenters or performers. In total, 22 children were interviewed individually. Interviews were also conducted with parents of the children, media and communication experts, producers, and anchors of children’s programmes, and a few programme managers from child rights organisations. The focus groups and interviews were conducted during the period June–November 2018.

Primarily, the outcomes of the focus groups and interviews with the children were useful for comprehending the level and qualitative aspects of participation. Simultaneously, interviews with people like producers or senior managers from the stations were useful as well to identify the challenges to children’s TV programming. The contents of the selected children’s TV programmes were analysed. Instead of formulating a critical analysis of the shows, the contents were examined in order to identify the gaps or missing dimensions of participation. In this respect, there was also an analysis of the parts that demonstrate the active participation of children. For content analysis, two episodes broadcast in 2018 from each of the three selected children’s programmes on individual TV channels were selected.

Selection of TV Channels

In selecting the TV channels, preference was given to the ones which have been consistently delivering significant numbers of programmes for children. Since the channels were selected purposively, this process also took into account credibility, reach, and coverage of the channels. Bangladesh Television (BTV), ATN Bangla, Channel i, and Duronto TV were chosen for the study.

State TV network BTV started in 1964. Besides being the network’s terrestrial service, it launched an international satellite channel named BTV World in 2004. BTV’s terrestrial broadcasting covers around 95% of the country. Among other segments, its audiences consist of huge numbers of children. According to the BBC World Service Trust survey report “Understanding BTV’s audiences” (BBC, 2011), BTV is more popular with people from rural areas. The survey results show that BTV is leading in making health-, agriculture-, and child-related programmes. It finds that 33% of the respondents think BTV is best at producing programmes for children, 62% of BTV viewers watch “Programmes for Children”, and 69% of respondents also believe that BTV is covering wide-ranging topics for children’s programming. BTV broadcasts the highest number of children’s programmes. Currently it airs 16 programmes for children. Although the programmes on BTV do not always include elements of direct child participation, in recent years the state TV channel seems to have been keen on promoting children’s agendas as a way of participation. For example, a show named Amader Kotha (Our Story) (that began in 2009 and was discontinued in 2014) provided children with an opportunity, as well as a (media) space, to question policy makers and the government ministers on issues related to their rights and development.

Currently ATN Bangla is broadcasting the greatest number of children’s programmes among the commercial broadcasters. It was the first TV channel to have broadcast a weekly one-minute news segment, Shishur Chokhe (In the Eye of the Child) made by children. The channel’s programmes for children have received national and international recognition. An ATN Bangla production, Amrao Pari (We Too Can), won the International Children’s Day of Broadcasting Award at the 32nd International Emmy Awards Gala in 2004. The documentary was shot and directed by a group of 18 children. It focusses on the true story of Abul Khaer, a nine-year-old boy, who prevented an accident by helping to stop a passenger train from approaching a disjointed rail track. According to a BBC Audience Survey Report, ATN Bangla was top
among the private satellite channels. Twenty-three per cent of the survey respondents thought ATN was one of the best channels to produce programmes on children (while 34% thought BTV was good at producing similar programmes) (BBC, 2011).

Channel i is one of the oldest private TV channels of the country. The channel has been producing programmes for children since its inception in 1999. Children’s shows on the channel involve child performers and it encourages outdoor activities. Currently Channel i is broadcasting a campus-based school magazine and a children’s musical reality show. It has been airing *Shorno Kishoree* (Golden Girl), a programme targeting adolescent health issues, for the last few years. It also jointly organises national conventions with the Shorno Kishoree Network Foundation (SKNF) for promoting an ongoing campaign to ensure the physical and mental health education and conducive environment for adolescents.

**Duronto TV**, producing programmes specifically for children, began operation in 2017. Among other programmes, the channel broadcasts dubbed internationally popular cartoons, kids sport shows, and films. The channel has its own productions for children, some of which are inspired by local traditions, while others are adapted from foreign shows.

**An Analysis of Children’s Participation**

There was no complete list of children’s programmes aired by Bangladeshi TV channels. Part of the programme schedules are available in newspapers and on the channels’ websites. But the information is not sufficient to provide a holistic understanding of the child’s role in the shows. Therefore, a comprehensive list of children’s programmes (currently on air) on the selected four channels (BTV, ATN Bangla, Channel i, and Duronto TV), was first prepared, from which two episodes of the following shows were selected (Table 50.1):

- Generally, children are involved either as presenters (of news bulletins or magazine shows, for example) or performers (in drama, music, etc.) in children’s shows. They are guided and directed by adult producers or directors, and the children follow their instructions. Sometimes children find it difficult to understand their roles in the shows. Most of the children’s shows are produced by adults, in which children participate partially in selected aspects. In the interviews with children, one question was whether they are unsatisfied because they cannot do what they wanted to do, or are they happy with their roles? Nehal, Shabbir, Othoi, and Lalin, aged between 8 and 10 years, have taken part in children’s magazine shows on private channels. Recently they have been inspired by a child-led news programme and started to think they too can become reporters, as Nehal says:

  *We were lucky to have performed on TV shows. Our music teacher helped us to establish contacts with the channels. Among other children’s programmes, these days we watch *Amra Korbo Joy*. We find it very inspiring. We want to work as child journalists, but do not how to go about it.*  
  
  *(Interview, 2018)*

- Fareen, a 13-year-old girl who participated in children’s magazine shows as a dancer and singer, said that she was happy to be on the TV shows, but wanted to do something else:

  *I told the producers that I am good at playing the violin and want to perform in a show. First they did not respond to this. Later one of them told me that the violin is not quite popular in our country and it hard for them to find me an opportunity for playing the instrument. After that, with the help of our parents, I and my twin sister recorded our performance and uploaded it onto YouTube.*  
  
  *(Interview, 2018)*
Fareen and her sister also told us that they no longer feel sad that they are not able to play the violin on a TV show. They are now happy as finally they could play the musical instrument and that now people can watch it online. There are, however, a few adult-led programmes, such as *Moner Kotha* (Voice of Heart), a puppet show on BTV. This has gained a reputation for

### Table 50.1 Children’s shows for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV channel</th>
<th>Programme/show</th>
<th>Brief description/children’s role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BTV (Bangladesh Television)</td>
<td><strong>Moner Kotha</strong> (Voice of Heart)</td>
<td>A puppet show conducted by an adult with an edutainment approach. Children participate in the show as performers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>123 Sisimpur</strong></td>
<td>An edutainment programme adapted from <em>Sesame Street</em>. Children are not part of programme planning, but they take part in all episodes of the show.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Ichae Dana</strong> (Wings of Wishes)</td>
<td>This is a drama show highlighting stories of girl children facing obstacles in life and having to overcome the challenges as adolescents. The programme is a joint effort of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Ministry of Information, UNICEF, and UNFPA. It is also aired by private channels, ATN Bangla and Duronto TV.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATN Bangla</td>
<td><strong>Amra Korbo Joy</strong> (We Shall Overcome)</td>
<td>A children-led news bulletin with active participation of children. They perform as presenters of the bulletin, work in the production process, and undertake journalistic assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Chotoder Prithibi</strong> (Children’s World)</td>
<td>An edutainment show in which children are engaged in singing, recitation, etc. A child presenter attempts to educate children through storytelling.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Aha Ki Ananda</strong> (Eh What a Joy)</td>
<td>An entertainment-oriented show in which children can sing and dance. They also take part in fashion shows, recitations, quizzes, etc. In a quiz show, children can participate through mobile texting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel i</td>
<td><strong>Tifin-Tifin</strong></td>
<td>A campus-oriented TV magazine, organised in different school campuses. Students perform as singers, actors, reciters, and dancers. The show also includes interviews with celebrities.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Shera Kontho</strong> (Best Voice)</td>
<td>This is a musical reality show. The programme searches for talented singers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Shorno Kishoree</strong> (Golden Girl)</td>
<td>This programme covers issues related to leadership, early marriage, personal hygiene, and the mental health of adolescents. School children attend training sessions with experts and take part in activities such as debates and discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duronto TV</td>
<td><strong>B Tae Bondhu</strong> (B for Bondhu/Friend)</td>
<td>A family-situation drama show with an edutainment approach.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Duronto Shomoy</strong> (Speed and Time)</td>
<td>Children’s health-related show aiming to educate children about food, health, and exercise.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Golpo Sheshe Ghumer Deshe</strong> (Stories Before Sleep)</td>
<td>Prominent actors and actresses read out or tell stories to children.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
providing quality programmes for children. Conducted by a renowned artist and puppeteer, Mostafa Monwar, the show has been on air for around three decades.

Continuity of children’s programmes is an outstanding issue in TV programming. As was noted earlier, the country’s first fully-fledged child-led show *Mukto Khobor* was discontinued on ETV due to funding constraints. Another private broadcaster, ATN Bangla, also discontinued a child-led news segment, *Shishur Chokhe* (In the Eyes of the Child). Similar things happened to many other children’s programmes. As the donor funding was discontinued or the contract period was over, TV channels failed, or, in some cases, were unwilling, to continue to finance children’s shows. A number of producers and senior personnel of the TV stations tell us that the commercial sponsors and channel management do not find children’s programmes profitable. Referring to TV operators’ unwillingness to run children’s programmes, Tanzina, a producer of *Amra Korbo Joy*, gives her opinion:

Channel operators are usually reluctant to produce children’s programmes although often they relate this to lack of funding. I don’t think funding is the main issue. I see this as a lack of willingness. I think specific provisions need to be included in “National Broadcast Policy” to ensure the TV channels are obliged to allocate certain hours of airtime to children.  

*(Interview, 2018)*

In 2018, only one show allowed children to participate in the pre-production and post-production levels. In *Amra Korbo Joy* (We Shall Overcome) on ATN Bangla, children are involved in idea generation, the direction of the camera (but not operating the camera), and in the editing process. An editor consults children to finalise themes or topics for the show. Children collect information from the field, prepare news, and do the editing. In the final stage they present the news. In the editing process children are assisted by adults, although the children have the final say about choosing clips. On receiving help from adult staff from the channel, a child reporter of the news bulletin says, “If we face any difficulty, we ask for advice from the editor. In the absence of the editor, we ask other senior reporters for assistance” *(interview, 2018).* Parents were asked about their perceptions of the scope of active participation of children in TV: do they want their children to ask for more roles, or are they content with the present level of participation? One parent, Koushik Bhattachariya, thinks that children perform on the media the way producers want them to. He does not see any additional scope for children to propose any further options *(interview, 2018).* Another parent, Sabita Ghosh, comments:

My daughter’s extracurricular teacher sent her (my daughter) to TV stations to perform. Every time the producers decided what to do and how to do it. I do not think there is any scope here for children to express their wishes.  

*(Interview, 2018)*

Except for *Amra Korbo Joy*, children are not involved in content development, neither do they play any role in finalising themes or deciding the treatment of the news. Overall, there is very little scope for children to participate as producers in legacy media. A former Deputy Director General of BTV (the person prefers to remain anonymous) said, “Unless effective guidelines are in place, it will be difficult for us to convince the TV stations to engage children as content generators and producers of children’s programmes”.

Compared with cultural and educational programmes, child-led news bulletins provide a better opportunity for children to participate actively in key stages of programming. However, participation in news-oriented programmes appears to be more relevant to older children or
adolescents. The participation of elementary- or middle-school students, for example, in children’s TV programming, is another issue that requires a special focus. With regard to awareness of the right to participate in the media, children in general are either unaware or do not have clear understanding of their rights to participate as makers and disseminators of media content. The children’s TV experts are of the view that the government, media and NGOs, and parents have a duty to help children to secure knowledge of their right to participation in media. Tania, a producer of children’s programmes, thinks:

Informative TV programmes on child rights may be useful for informing audiences of the importance of child rights in general, but not particularly of the right to “participation”. For me, there is a need to develop a mechanism so that both children and their parents are aware of the child’s right to participation. The government, NGOs and INGOs should play active roles to facilitate the application of this right.

(Interview, 2018)

Lack of awareness among the stakeholders on children’s media rights has a bearing on the realisation and implementation of children’s active participation in TV. In fact, the children who were engaged with the child rights organisations’ media projects have a partial understanding about the CRC ‘media-articles’ and their right to participation. Hence, there is a need to ‘develop a mechanism’, as well as a media culture, to promote children’s active engagement, as much as it is necessary to formulate policy guidelines so that children’s shows are incorporated in the programming of legacy media.

Digital Media Rights and Participation

The percentage of Bangladeshi children using mobile phones or smartphones and digital devices is not known, neither is there any official data specifically on the patterns of children’s internet use. However, The State of the World’s Children 2017 report informs us that fewer than 5% of Bangladeshi children aged under 15 use the internet (UNICEF, 2017, p. 43). In Bangladesh rapid technological changes, the development of online networks, and the adoption of digital devices have simultaneously posed challenges and opportunities. Digital media also “pose new and broad-ranging challenges for states in meeting their responsibilities to secure children’s rights to provision, protection and participation in society” (Livingstone, Lansdown, & Third, 2017, p. 6). While digital media show the potential to facilitate children’s expression, access, and active participation, the question is whether the UNCRC articles could still be relevant to ensure protection and participation in the digital age. More specifically, could the CRC ‘media articles’ still be relevant to children’s access to and participation in digital media?

In addressing the above question, it is worth noting that internet facilities and digital devices are not evenly distributed across the globe (Nielson, 2013, n.p.). The situation is affecting children’s access to digital media, particularly in the Global South where quality of access is an issue. This is also crucial in “shaping their capacity to leverage digital media and connectivity to enhance their rights” (Third et al., 2014, p. 32). Quality of access is both a prerequisite and integral part of children’s digital media rights. UNICEF Young Australia Ambassador Philip Chan perceives access and participation in digital media as:

a powerful way for children to realise their rights, from accessing information, playing games, to expressing themselves freely and even anonymously. Technology has a crucial role in empowering children by facilitating communication, education and activism.

(Third et al., 2014, p. 10)
Children’s use of digital media focusses on the right, as well as barriers, to accessing digital media devices, content, and services. Children’s rights in digital environments aim at “enhancing ways in which children can enact their rights in online spaces, and overcoming the ways in which their rights are infringed or violated in a host of digital, networked and online spaces” (Livingstone, Lansdown, & Third, 2017, p. 23). This leads to the question of whether there will be a need for another convention like the UNCRC to promote, ensure, and facilitate the right of the child to digital media; or if the existing Convention will do for digital media platform, device, content, and service.

**Participation Right in the Digital Future**

Given the status quo, implementing child participation in the emerging digital environment looks challenging. The policy responses to children’s exposure to digital media are expressed from a protectionist perspective, which does not focus adequately on the opportunities for children to use digital media. The findings of a study, “Online Safety of Children in Bangladesh” (UNICEF, 2019), warns of dangers as it identifies the threats to children posed by online violence, cyberbullying, and digital harassment. According to the study, 32% of children aged 10–17 years who are online are at risk of or victims of bullying or some kind of harassment. On launching the report, Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF Bangladesh Representative, calls for safeguarding children, as he says:

> Thirty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and creation of the World Wide Web, it’s time for the government, families, academia and, critically, the private sector to put children and young people at the centre of digital policies.

(“Cyber Safety”, 2019, para. 9)

Beigbeder’s statement connects us to the discussion on the need for a set of provisions and policies for children’s digital media rights. As the digital environment is going to be crucial, in a report prepared for the Children’s Commissioner for England in relation to UNCRC and digital media, Livingstone, Lansdown, and Third (2017) comment:

At stake is identifying, anticipating and addressing the global relevance of the UNCRC in the “digital age”, by and across geographic regions, and encompassing all dimensions of children’s lives. If society can seize the opportunities, digital media will surely constitute a powerful tool for delivering on the promise of the Convention.

(p. 48)

They caution that failure in this initiative would threaten to “undermine children’s rights on a significant scale” (Livingstone, Lansdown, & Third, 2017, p. 48). In a roundtable jointly organised by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Bangladesh and The Daily Star, discussants emphasised how youth could utilise digital spaces. They found potential for the robust engagement of young people in digital spaces. The discussants also think digital media is providing Bangladeshi young people with the freedom to express opinions and opportunities to interact virtually across borders (“Safe Spaces”, 2018).

In the digital age, it is imperative that children’s information and participation rights are respected and implemented. Therefore, “we need a digital rights charter for children based on the UN Convention” (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009, p. 189). The principles as outlined in CRC articles 12, 13, 16, and 17, for example, can be applied to children’s digital media rights. In other
words, as children’s participation is still important for overcoming challenges that infringe upon their access to and participation in digital spaces, as well as to maximising opportunities offered by digital media, key provisions of UNCRC remain very much pertinent for the digital future. In addition to the CRC articles that encourage active children’s participation in traditional broadcast media, other interrelated articles of the CRC, such as articles 2, 3, 6, 8, 28, 29, 30, and 31, can expedite children’s safety and development in the digital age.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study finds that the CRC ‘media articles’ are not yet used in legacy media to their full potential. In practice, there are very limited opportunities for children to participate in key stages of TV programming. Their access to the media is partial and indirect or secondary in nature. Media producers, initiators, and investors lack sufficient knowledge of the vitality of children’s participation in the broadcasting process. Many of them do not seem to have enough knowledge of the Convention to which Bangladesh is a signatory. They have not mentioned their obligations to ensure child participation, although most of them referred to funding constraint as an outstanding challenge to the sustainability of child-focussed and child-led TV programmes. In this respect, one recommendation is that there should be mandatory policy provisions aimed at ensuring child participation in broadcasting media. In addition, in order to develop the skills to participate in the planning and production process, children should be able to receive training and supervisory guidance from the TV channels.

As a logical extension, the issue of children’s participation in legacy media is linked to the concerns about and potential for their participation in the sphere of digital media. There are a few efforts to promote children’s online safety and security but these do not recommend any charter to guarantee participation in the emerging digital media. However, there is an urgent need to develop a charter or convention for children’s participation right in digital media. Deregulation and the liberalisation of communications along with a rise in economic growth in South Asia have triggered a sudden expansion of conventional broadcast media in the private sector. As a result, TV has once again become a powerful media-space for children to negotiate their rights. The parallel development of a digital media space and legacy media make it necessary to have a charter or convention in place to address new challenges to children’s participation.

As participation has become a focus of increasing attention in safeguarding the rights of the child, it appears from this study that participation in terms of active media engagement needs to be revisited both for legacy and the burgeoning digital media. While it is now imperative to have a charter (or maybe a non-negotiable convention) for digital media, this raises further questions. Should there be a completely new convention for digital media? Should there be a new charter based on the UN Convention? Or should there be a modification of the UNCRC in line with digital communications? Bearing in mind the implications of this study and subsequently the scope of this chapter, until the State parties agree upon a new charter or convention (or propose to add new clauses to the existing Convention) for children’s digital rights, in spirit, the fundamental principles that CRC outlines can still be applied to implement children’s participation in the field of digital media.

References


