

# **THE DYNAMICS OF MEDIA- THINK TANK RELATIONS: INSIGHTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BANGLADESHI MEDIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Media and think tanks have strong incentives to engage with each other. While think tanks require media to propagate their research findings to the policy makers and attentive public, media needs think tanks expertise to explain issues and analyse current affairs, be it foreign policy or macro economy. This study examines the dynamics of interrelation between media and think tanks from the perspective of Bangladeshi media. 57 journalists responded through structured questionnaire and eight senior journalists and think tank communication staff were interviewed as key informants. Findings reveal that independent think tanks are one of the key sources of information for journalists but the usefulness as a source varies depending on thematic areas. Journalists consider research quality as the most critical attribute in a think tank but also believe that research initiatives should be complemented with advocacy activities. Reliability, credibility and extent of research are important considerations for media. Journalists are engaging with think tanks in various forms but they are constantly seeking quickly accessible and usable information. They are less likely to read a policy brief or research report produced by a think tank and more likely to navigate for data or information on the think tanks' website. Think tanks are often engaging with journalists with a short term focus (e.g. getting media coverage of a dissemination event). Think tanks are far less likely to approach this engagement strategically, developing sustained relations through systematic public relations efforts or including media in capacity development programs. While journalists acknowledge that it may be challenging for think tanks to operate with complete independence in a politically divisive and partisan context, they are more like to engage with think tanks that have a reputation of operating with relative political and operational independence. Findings suggest that think tanks must be more proactive and systematic in reaching out to media, prepare themselves better to present the findings and carefully consider the relevance and timing of research to better engage media.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Media, Policy influence, Think tanks

## **INTRODUCTION**

Think tanks or policy research institutes conduct research and seek to influence public policies with their research findings. To achieve the influence, think tanks engage with a wide variety to stakeholders. While think tanks' primary focus are politicians and bureaucrats who formulate polices, these institutions also seek to engage with civil society, media and other stakeholders in the policy community. Media (press and electronic) is one of the key actors in the policy making process and quite understandably think tanks strive to maintain close ties with media.

Some think tanks disseminate some of their research findings, policy ideas and proposals through media. But media also has a special significance for think tanks because

a number of think tanks equate media exposure as a measure of policy influence. However, information on media exposure is not always a credible measure of how much influence it has on policy. But it does provide insights on how 'active' or 'engaged' the think tank is on a topic (Abelson, 2006: 161). Therefore, engagement with media is an important preoccupation for think tanks. Empirical observations suggest that while think tanks in North America and Europe invest significant resources on media engagement, think tanks in developing countries are only starting to systematically and strategically plan the interactions with media.

This study (taking Bangladesh as a case) is focused on assessing journalists' perception of think tanks-media interrelations. In particular, it strives to shed light on how media, being an important stakeholder in the policy process, views the role of think tanks. Potentially, this study can contribute to deepening the understanding of the key drivers of interactions between media and think tanks. More importantly, this study can offer practical insights on how think tanks can effectively engage with the media to bolster visibility (and influence).

## **MUTUAL INCENTIVES**

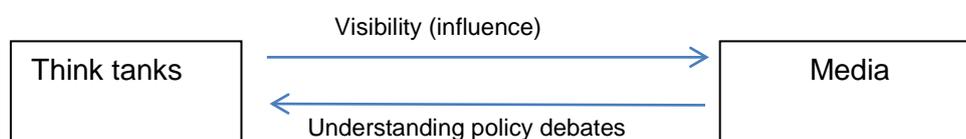
The incentives for engagement between think tanks and media are often mutual. Both actors engage with the each other for a number of diverse and distinct reasons. The following discussion strives to map the key factors that drive the interface between think tanks and media.

### *From think tanks' perspective*

Media visibility has become an important priority for think tanks. Without a public constituency backing their efforts, the influence of expertise-providing organizations often depends on visibility their research obtains (Rich & Weaver, 2000). Typically, each think tank is pleased to report the number of publications it issues, the frequency that staff members appear on national television, and the numerous citations of its activity in the print media (Weidenbaum, 2010: 135). Whitty (2008: 19) notes that the media are important tools for communicating research, but are not in themselves beneficiaries. Their utility is strictly instrumental. However, media are also actors in their own rights, and must be convinced of the merits of the research. Medvetz (2010), examining the self-understandings of think tank-affiliated policy experts, argue that policy experts draw on a series of idioms - those of the academic scholar, the political aide, the entrepreneur, and the media specialist - to construct a unique professional identity. Policy experts, Medvetz notes, must exhibit a knack for writing in plain language and a willingness to compose short, compact studies in a form similar to press releases or newspaper articles. Thus think tank executives consolidate their technical, complex ideas into something that is really very understandable and usable for media (Medvetz, 2010: 555). Among the different types of think tanks, advocacy think tanks, by definition, have a special emphasis on media relation. The main focus of advocacy think tank research is to provide information on current issues that policy makers and media need to know. Unlike the academic or contract-based think tanks, advocacy think tanks try to market their ideas to particular audiences, notably media, rather than maintain a more objective approach. Their main focus is on producing short-term research they can distribute quickly to media and policy makers (Ahmad 2008:538). Academics and think tanks themselves routinely analyse media coverage to gauge think tanks influence. Rich and Weaver (2000) analysed references of 51 US think tanks in six national newspapers. Michael Dolny

conducts annual survey of think tank citations in major newspapers, TV and radio for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR<sup>54</sup>).

There can also be a strong political dimension in the manner in which think tanks engage with media. In the USA, for example, think tanks with open political inclination tend to engage extensively with similarly aligned media. Miller-Cribbs et al. (2010) note how conservative think tanks in the US socialized and trained a fleet of media-ready advocates and pundits and linked their conservative agenda directly to the public via the media. Their paper demonstrates that conservative think tanks are extraordinarily press savvy and they aggressively seek media coverage while courting and flattering the press. Free messengers are available to deliver publications in time for deadlines to reporters. They focus on making the reports readable, colorful, and full of important or poignant quotes in large font (Miller-Cribbs et al, 2010: 298). A study by Feldman (2007) demonstrates that US organizations and media, generally considered left-wing, have in recent years received substantial funding from liberal foundations. Therefore, there are strong political dynamics (which are often complex and nebulous) driving the relations among political parties, think tanks and media.



#### *From media's perspective*

At the same time, journalists seek out expertise of the think tanks in order to understand and explain policy debates and clarify technical issues. Often expertise of the think tanks is used to validate conclusions of journalistic reports and stories. Think tank analysts are quoted as experts in the print media and appear on television programs and talk shows. Due to the nature of the media's work, their demands for think tanks' opinion is often time-specific, i.e they draw on opinions that are relevant to timely subjects for stories. Journalists are also prone to use think tanks that fit their needs (Rich, 2005:86). Yettick (2011), who studied educational research mentioned in three media outlets in the USA, notes that media gives disproportionate amount of attention to advocacy-oriented think-tanks. The study reveals that advocacy-oriented think-tank studies were more likely to be mentioned in the news sources than studies by non-advocacy think tanks. Empirical evidence also suggests that there is a tendency for newspaper reporters to repeatedly quote the same small group of media-friendly 'experts'. Haas (2007:65) supports the contention that the news media often select their expert sources based more on convenience than on standing within the scientific community. However, in some developing countries with challenging political and security contexts, it can be difficult to elicit opinions and expert comments from any sources on sensitive issues. In such situations, media relies significantly on inputs from think tanks and has strong incentives to maintain relation with think tanks.

Therefore, from media's perspective, their engagement with think tanks is shaped by a number of different factors. These include their own unique professional characteristics and ways of functioning, their demand for accessibility and functionality of information, and expert opinions. Also it can be hypothesised that media driven by certain ideology and political orientations are more likely to seek expertise from think tanks who espouse similar ideologies (ideological proximity). Also there are differences between think tank staff and journalists in terms of their professional thinking that shapes this interface. Researchers tend to have more knowledge than journalists about the topics on which they comment or write and more circumspect about what they profess to know about a given topic and the

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=3322>

conclusions they feel comfortable drawing as a result. They test their truths with relevant counterarguments and footnoted references that can be examined by those with opposing views. Journalists, on the other hand, usually treat anything as true if someone in a position of ostensible authority is willing to say it, even anonymously. If no evidence is available for an argument a journalist wishes to include in a story, then words such as "it seems" or "some claim" are used to enable inclusion of the argument, no matter how shaky its foundation in reality (Alterman, 2011).

The emergence of cable news channels has drastically increased the exposure of think tank commentators in developing countries. News show regularly feature think tanks executives and analysts. But this phenomenon also poses a challenge for think tanks. The media appears to be more drawn to 30-second sound bite and superficial examination of issues rather than in-depth analysis. These practices can often undermine the basic standards desirable for rigorous analysis of the issue. Think tanks are under pressure to offer real time commentary on current events, which can sometimes infringe upon the quality of research associated with think tanks. Some institutions are more concerned with dissemination rather than the quality of outputs (McGann 2007:65). Think tanks are also forced to rethink their strategies in the Web 2.0 culture and in the age of social media.

From the above discussions, the emerging questions from think tanks' perspective are

1. What are the key dynamics of the relations between media and think tanks?
2. How does the media view think tanks' role?
3. How do journalists assess think tanks' efforts of engagement with media?
4. What are the challenges for effective engagement with media?
5. How can think tanks increase access to media, bolster visibility?

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of the study is to deepen the understanding of media-think tanks interface, taking Bangladesh as a case. More specifically, the study will try to capture

- Media's perception on the role of think tanks
- Media's perception on the key dynamics of interrelations between think tanks and media.

For the study, media corresponds to mainstream print and broadcast media in Bangladesh.

## **OVERVIEW OF MEDIA IN BANGLADESH**

Bangladesh is a low income country in South Asia with a large population of 160 million. Media, particularly electronic media, has proliferated tremendously in Bangladesh in the recent past. With this growth, the influence of media in the political and governance system has also increased notably. Media is intertwined with political and corporate interests, in often complex and nebulous ways, but undoubtedly media is having a stronger stake in the policy making processes and cycles. Media in Bangladesh is generally considered free. There are around 20 mainstream national newspapers in Bengali and English that have steady readership. Circulation varies from a few thousands to several hundred thousand. For example, the leading Bengali newspaper is estimated to have daily circulation of around 600,000. Readership of English daily newspaper is lower compared to Bengali newspapers. However, the leading English dailies have important role in shaping opinions within civil society and elite groups and are influential in policy circles. There are 25

television channels, including one state owned channel. All of these television channels broadcast news and analysis/ talk-shows on current events. Four of these are news channels. Data on viewership of television news channels is not readily available. But it is estimated that, collectively, there are between 10 to 20 million viewers of television channels.

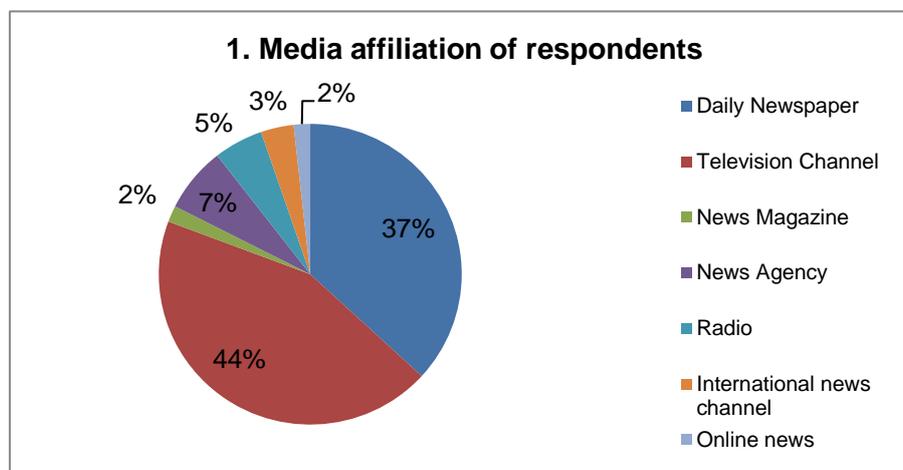
## METHODOLOGY

For this study, literature on think tanks and media relations were reviewed. Insights from the literature helped to develop the research questions. The Policy Community Survey (IDRC, 2011) was used as a reference for developing some of the questions. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaire (available in Bengali and English) and key informant interviews. 57 media representatives (randomly selected) in Bangladesh responded to the questionnaire. Key information interviews were conducted with eight senior and mid-career journalists and media professionals. The informants included head of news, news editors of newspapers and television channels, journalism lecturers, communication staff of think tanks, executive director of a media research group. All interviews took place in Dhaka during July and August 2012.

## RESPONDENT PROFILE

The 57 respondents of this survey represented 23 different media establishments. (Highest respondent per media was 5 and lowest 1). Respondents represented the major types of media in Bangladesh including daily newspaper, television channel, news magazine, news agency, radio, international news agency/ channel and online newspapers. The breakdown of respondents is roughly proportional to the journalists working in different media. The major two types of media are daily newspapers and television channel.

The data on 'designation' of the respondents was optional. This was done to ensure with utmost certainty that the identity of the journalist or the media is not revealed. However, majority of the respondent chose to identify their designation. Respondents included, among others, 9 Reporter/Staff Correspondent/Staff Reporter, 5 Senior Reporters, 6 Special Correspondents and 6 Joint News Editors and 4 News Editors.

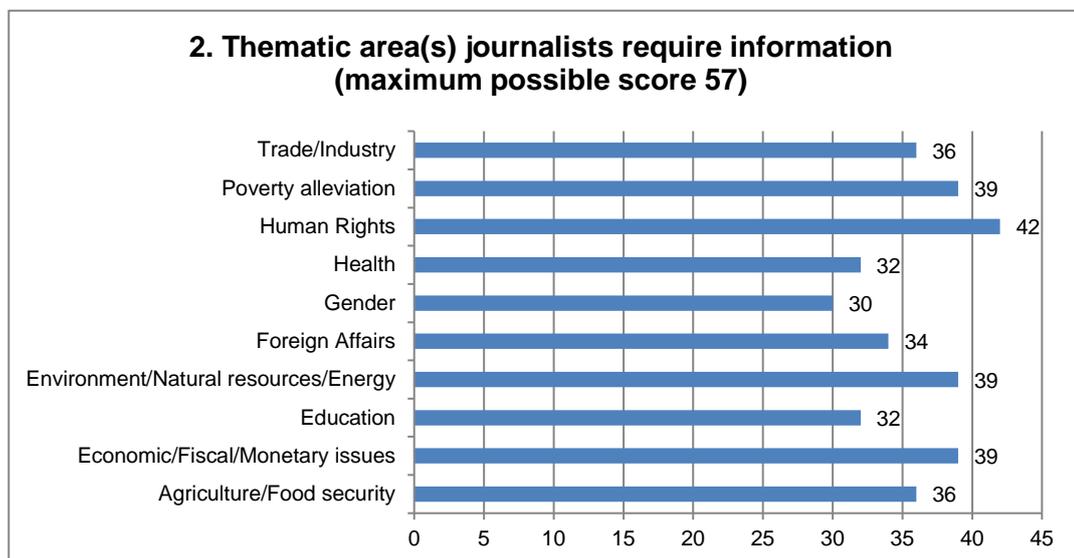


The respondents had different levels of experiences in journalism profession. The study had a higher percentage (46%) (above normal average) of senior journalists with experience of 11 years and over. 27% had between 4 to 10 years of experience and 27% had experience of less than 3 years. The female-male ratio was 12%-88%. Female journalists were perhaps slightly underrepresented.

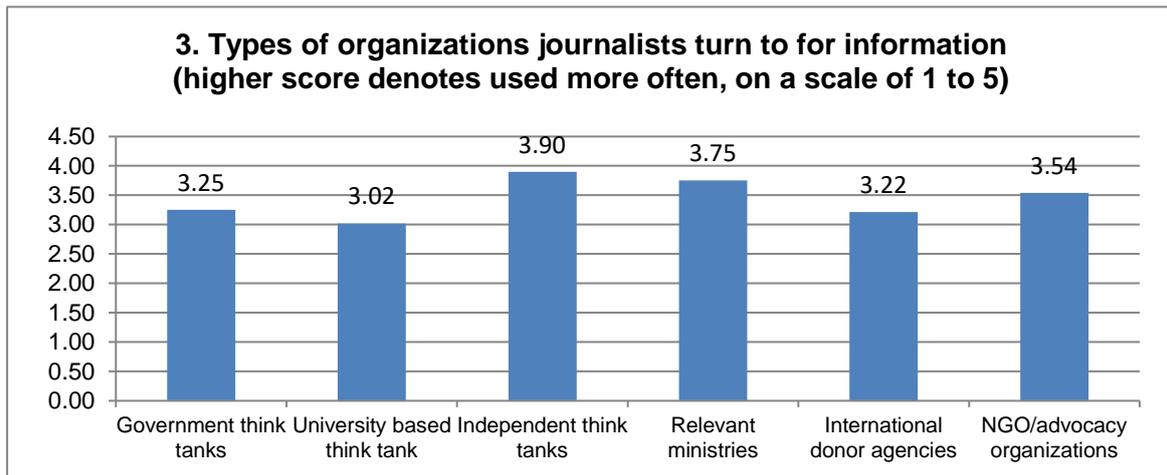
## MAJOR FINDINGS

### *Finding 1: Thematic areas and Sources of information*

Journalists were asked to identify the thematic area(s) they require information and the types of organizations they typically turn to for issue specific analysis/ information/ expert opinions. In response to the first question, the majority of the journalist selected multiple thematic areas.



Human rights, Poverty alleviation, and Environment, Economy were mentioned most times by the respondents. This is not a surprise given the relevance of these issues to country context of Bangladesh. A more interesting revelation is that independent think tanks emerged as one of the main sources of information compared to other possible sources. Somewhat surprisingly, journalists also considered government affiliated think tanks as a useful source. The other important sources are relevant government ministries, NGOs and advocacy organizations and international donor agencies.

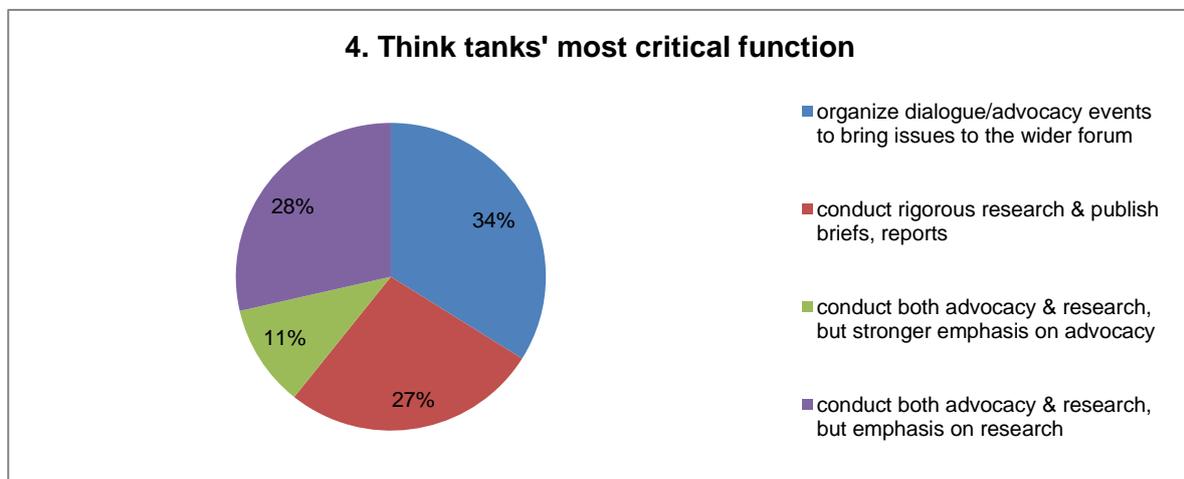


Some insights also emerge from key informant interviews. Journalists perceived that there is predominance of economic issue based think tanks in Bangladesh. Media representatives working other diverse issues only get partial information and sometimes no information from think tanks on the topics they are looking for, such as crime, or terrorism.

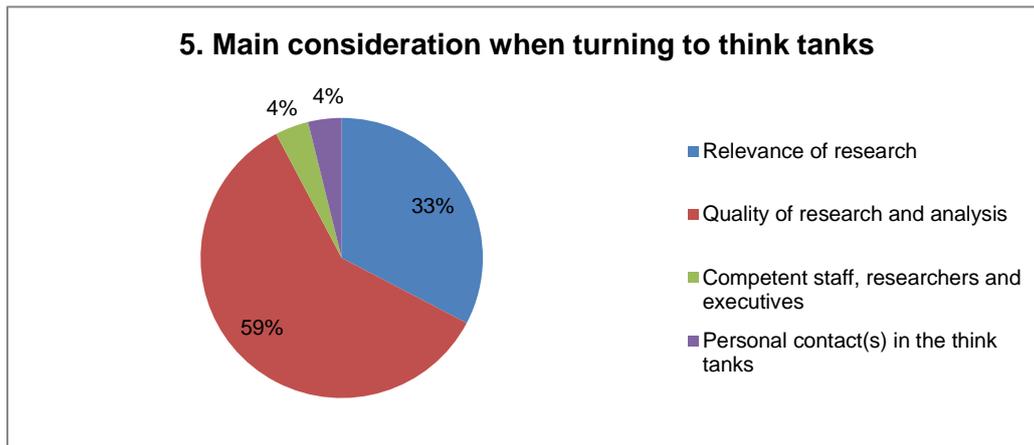
*Independent and government affiliated think tanks are one of the key sources of information for journalists but the usefulness as a source varies depending on thematic areas.*

**Finding 2: perception of think tanks' role**

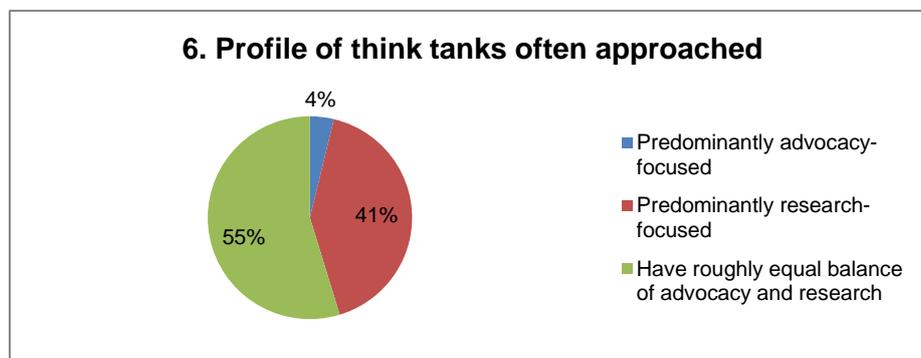
When asked about think tanks' most critical function the journalists express their clear emphasis on the research function. (Respondents could select only one option).



Journalists were subsequently asked to give the most important reason for turning to think tanks. (Respondents could select only one option).



Around 60% of the respondents stated that quality of research as the most critical consideration for contacting think tanks. One-third respondents stated that relevance of research is the main reason. This reinforces journalists' strong emphasis on think tanks' research.



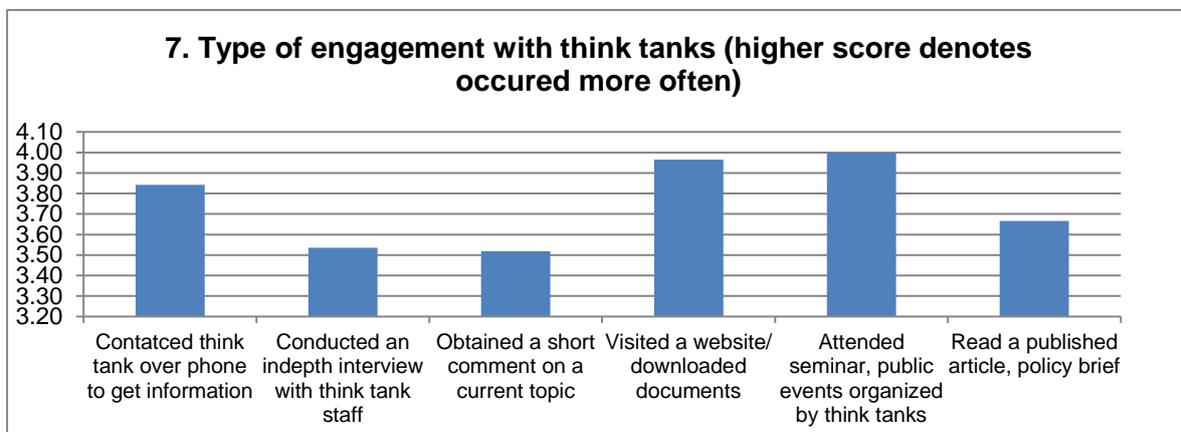
However, when asked about the profile of think tanks they approached, the majority responded that they contacted think tanks that had a roughly equal emphasis on research and advocacy. Still, over 40% respondents stated that the profile of the think tanks they usually contacted is predominantly research-focused. This finding underscores the value the journalists attach to research quality when contemplating to approach think tank organizations.

In the course of the informal exchanges with journalists, it was sometimes observed that media has a propensity to identify or define think tanks rather broadly, including different advocacy, movements, campaigns under the category of think tanks. Key informants highlighted the importance of reliability and extent of research. Media tend to be more interested in studies and research done on national focus rather than research done in localized contexts that cannot be generalized. While importance of research quality is underscored by journalists, they are highly unlikely to review or evaluate a paper with academic rigour. One journalist expressed his displeasure with exaggeration that one research paper he read recently had 8 pages of references out of total 12 pages.

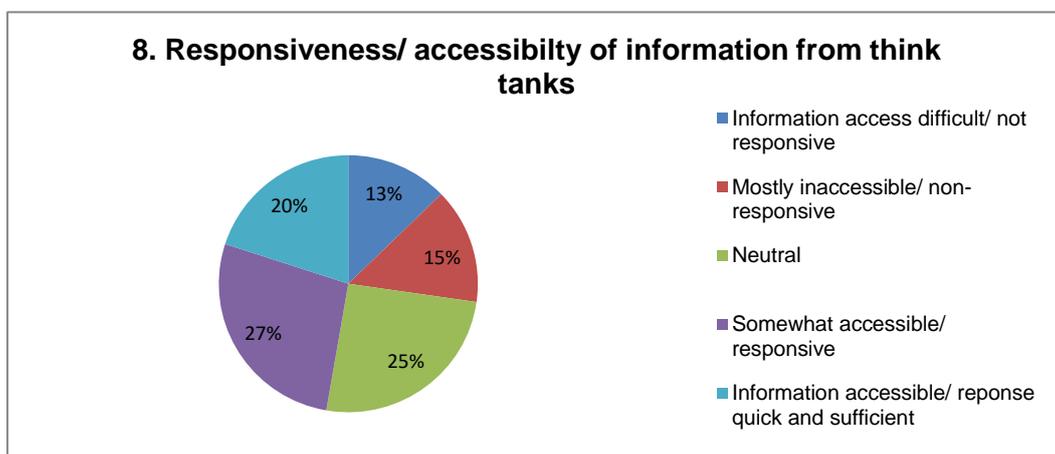
*Journalists consider research quality as the most critical factor for a think tank but also believe that their research initiatives should be complemented with advocacy activities. Reliability, credibility and extent of research are important considerations for media.*

**Finding 3: media’s engagement with think tanks**

During the key informant interviews, it became very clear that the issues of media’s engagement with think tanks must be contextualized in a broader frame. Questions around actual and perceived value and utility of knowledge and research as well as the capacity of the journalists are tied to these questions. Journalists tended to be quite self-critical during the key informant interviews. Many of the journalists acknowledged that the general knowledge base of Bangladeshi media representatives is low. Too often news is perception based rather than facts-based, which often confuses readers and even policy makers. Journalists are often prone to presenting superficial and incomplete information, looking to highlight the ‘sensitivity’ in an issue. Thus they often do not take recourse from organizations such as think tanks that can help build facts and evidence-base to the information. One senior journalist observed that media often tries to dictate and influence policy without adequate capacity or preparation. The journalists can potentially prepare themselves better by using the resources formulated by think tanks (information and research), if they wish to have meaningful influence on policy outcomes.



Journalists were asked to assess the different ways they engaged with think tanks. The type of engagement that was ‘frequently’ and ‘most often’ done was visiting think tanks website and attending seminars. This was followed by calling up think tanks to gather information, obtaining a short comment or sound-bite, respectively. Compared to these engagements, journalists are less likely to read policy brief, report, articles and journals as often. This is an interesting finding because think tanks dedicate a significant amount of effort and time in producing and publishing briefs and reports. Furthermore, in the earlier responses media expressed a clear emphasis on research quality of think tanks, which is often assessed through the quality of publications of think tanks.



Journalists were asked to evaluate the accessibility of information and responsiveness of the think tanks / policy research institutions, in general. Responses are mostly positive, with 20% saying that Information ‘accessible/ response quick and sufficient’ and 27% ‘Somewhat accessible/ responsive’. Still, over one in four journalists replied that they had difficulties in getting information. This is a critical issue because a journalist who faces difficulty in getting information and data from any organization will be very circumspect about going back to that source and will seek other alternatives. Nevertheless, when journalists were asked to assess their own network with media, 42% respond that their network with think tank staff is ‘very strong’ or ‘somewhat strong’. Around 25% feel that their contacts with think tanks are weak. 38% gave neutral response, i.e. their network with think tanks is neither strong, nor weak.

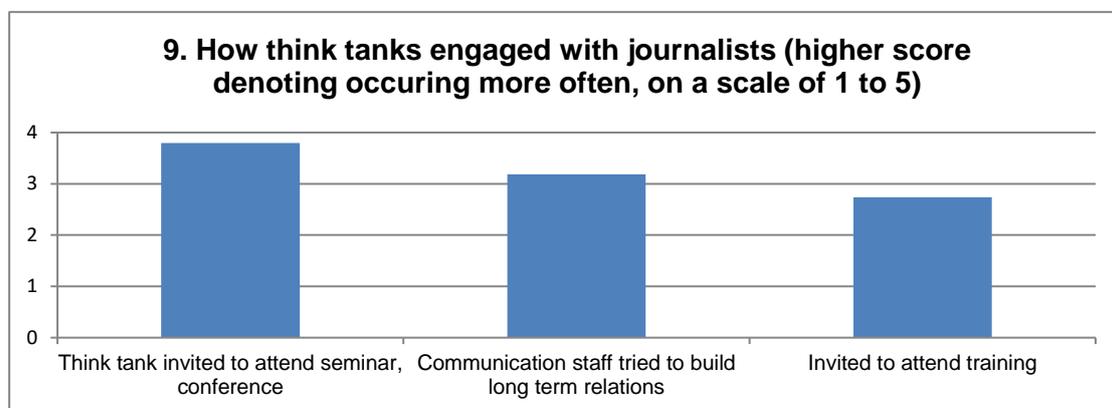
Another aspect of the think tank-media engagement is with whom in the think tanks journalists are interacting more. During key informant interviews, it was evident that media often establishes closer and direct relations at the higher level of think tanks, with top executives and senior researchers, who are giving interviews and presenting research findings. Communication staffs of the think tanks are sometimes not kept in the loop.

During key informant interviews, some respondents opined that think tanks’ work may have slightly more relevance to print media in comparison with electronic media. Print media’s work is less ‘momentary’ than electronic media. During a news program, a television channel is rarely able to allot much air-time to think tank events, or sound bite of a think tank executive. On the other hand, print media has more scope and time to be able to go deeper into an issue, analyzing research findings or comments in greater detail. One key informant noted that only a handful of think tanks are able to maintain quality and quantity of work and standards of professionalism. Media is more likely to approach those think tanks.

*Journalists are engaging with think tanks in various forms but they are constantly seeking quickly accessible and usable information. They are less likely to read a full report produced by a think tank and more likely to navigate for data and information on the think tanks website.*

**Finding 4: think tank strategies to effectively engage with journalists**

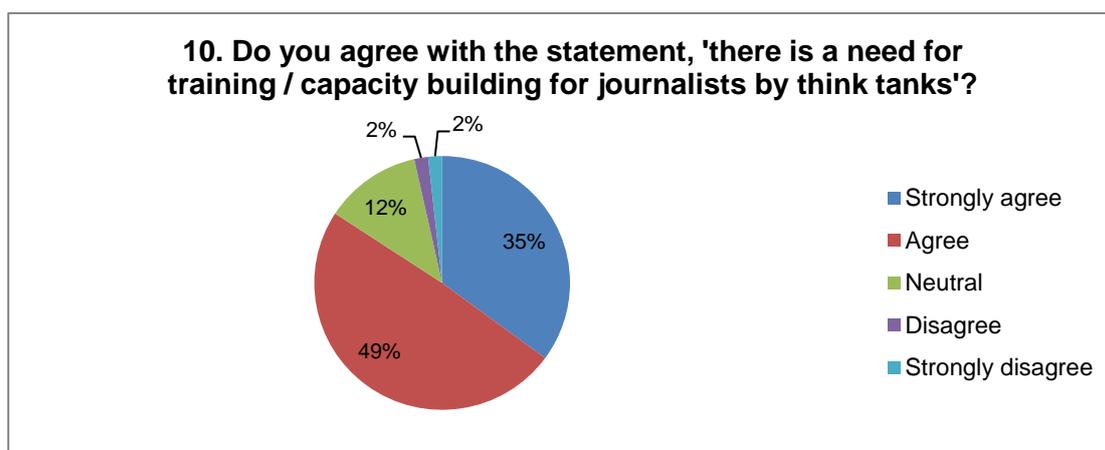
Journalists also assessed how think tanks have approached and engaged with them. Somewhat expectedly most journalists stated that think tanks often invited them for a seminar or other public events. However, it is much less common for think tanks to try to build long term relations and to engage them in different training programs and events.



During key informant interviews, some journalists observed that on many occasions the research and studies of think tanks are not made on time (the issue is not current

anymore) and thus lack relevance for journalists. In such scenarios, piquing media's interest in the topics can be a challenge. Thus, timing is a critical factor from journalists' perspective. The right 'timing' in undertaking research studies and dissemination will generate interest among media. Thus it may be important for think tanks to anticipate and work on issues and topics that will have 'currency' with media.

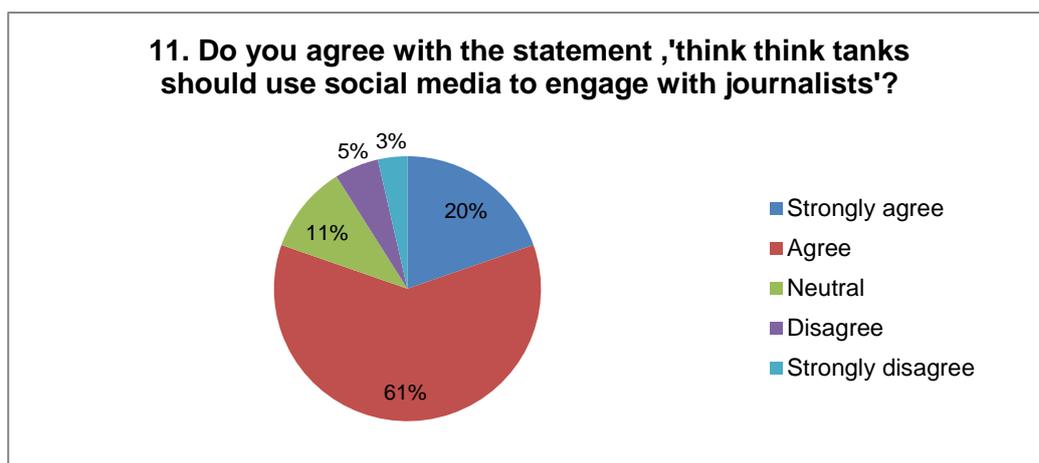
A few journalists observed that think tanks have a tendency to engage deeply with certain media establishments only. Thus some think tanks rely disproportionately on a handful of media. One journalist noted that it is normal for think tanks to seek stronger ties with most circulated or most popular media. However, a balanced focus on all media potentially reaps greater benefit in fostering strong relationship and acceptability among the media. During key informant interviews, few respondents noted that presence of many journalists in think tanks events or programs does not always result in reporting on the think tank, the topic or research findings. Journalists occasionally would side-track from the issue of the event and highlight what a minister or other chief guests of the program states on a different topic. This scenario is more observed in the case of electronic media. One key informant noted the importance of think tank executive directors being 'eloquent, sharp, and even provocative' to get media, especially electronic media's attention. It is critical for think tank top executive to prepare well for media – carefully thinking what/how messages are delivered, questions are answered or dodged. This observation echoes what Medvetz (2010) notes in his paper regarding think tank-affiliated policy experts, needing to display characteristics of a media specialist. A few journalists indicated that normally they would turn to more aged think tanks because those think tanks are more likely to have greater volume of resources on a wider array of issues gathered over the years.



When asked if there a need for training / capacity building for journalists by think tanks, the majority responded positively. Nearly 85% 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that think tanks can include media in various training programs. The journalists mostly stated that the training should be 'subject-based', on different thematic areas. Some of these subjects mentioned include local governance, economy, trade policy, policy related issues, gender, human rights, poverty alleviation, socio-economic development, law, climate change, market behavior, etc. Some respondents mentioned more specific subjects such as water sharing, sea boundary delimitation etc. A few respondents mentioned journalistic training such as health journalism, cyber journalism etc. Other respondents mentioned training to develop journalists understanding about the types of work and modus operandi of research initiatives, different types of research approaches, and methodologies of think tanks. One responded noted that 'training can be on any topic, but important thing for think tanks is building rapport with journalists through presenting their findings'. This remark supports the notion that including media in training programs can not only benefit the journalistic work of media but also help to build stronger networks. Interestingly, a few journalists noted that

dialogue between think tanks and media should be organized to provide insights to think tanks on how media functions.

Key informants saw a highly positive and important role of think tanks in Bangladesh vis-à-vis media capacity building. Think tanks are already contributing to clarifying and deepening the understanding of journalists on diverse issues. Journalists are used to remaining at a superficial level in dealing with topics and think tanks often help and encourage the journalists to delve deeper into the issues. One senior journalist noted that think tanks helped develop the habit of reading for journalists by presenting different briefs, papers and studies. They strongly feel that think tank can do a lot more in this area. Journalists evaluated how proactively and effectively the Bangladeshi think tanks are communicating with media. Almost half of the respondents give neutral response. This could mean that they have insufficient information to make a general assessment on this question. This can also signify that some think tanks are doing well while others are not in this area. However, in general respondents are more likely to be positive rather than negative regarding think tanks' efforts to communicate with media. Journalists were asked to comment whether think tanks in Bangladesh produce communication materials (e.g. press releases) that are clear in terms of language and content and are easily usable by journalists. Respondents seem ambivalent on this question, with 36% giving a neutral response. 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the communication materials are good.

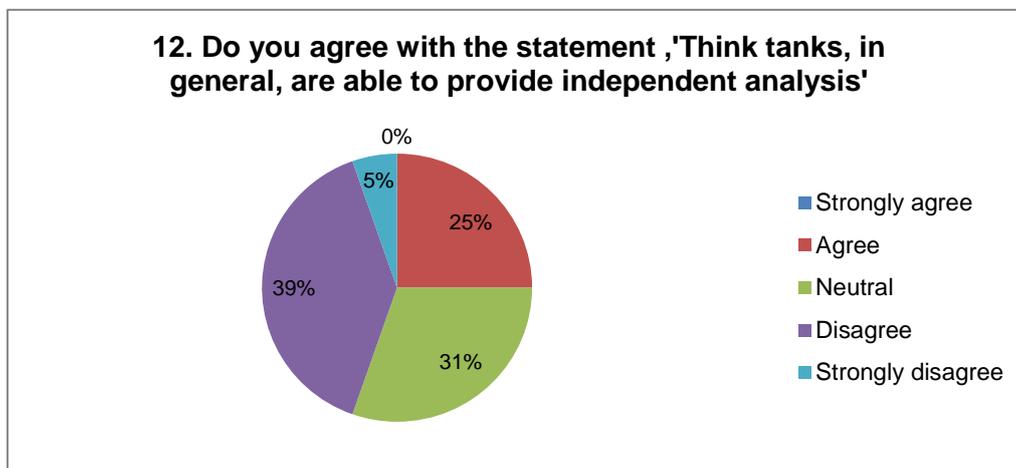


Media representative were asked to give opinion on whether think tanks should use social media such as Facebook and Twitter to engage with media and wider publics. An overwhelming majority (over 80%) responded that they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that think tanks should use social media to engage with media. A recent phenomenon observed by some key informants is that some leading newspapers are undertaking own policy-relevant research and organizing dialogues with key policy stakeholders to disseminate the findings. Even some media has outsourced studies to external firms to conduct research. This is fairly common in US and other developed countries but is new development in countries like Bangladesh, which can have implications for think tanks.

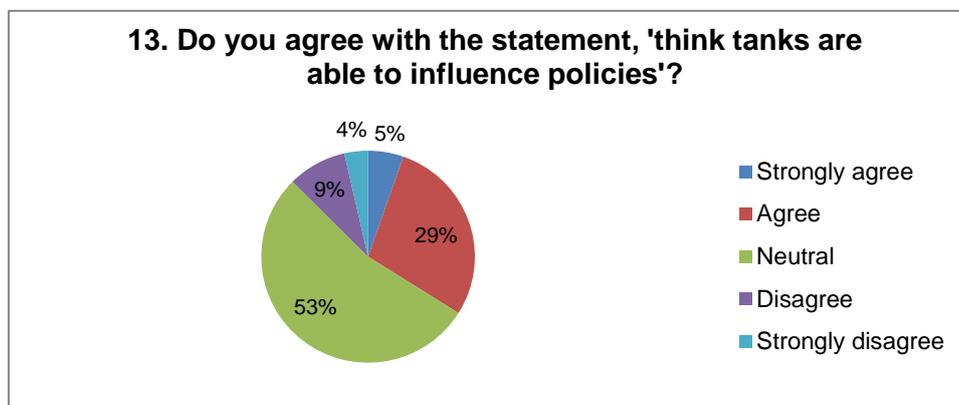
*Think tanks are engaging with journalists with a short term focus (e.g. getting media coverage of a dissemination event). Think tanks are far less likely to be approaching this engagement strategically, developing sustained relations through systematic public relations efforts or including media in capacity development/ training events. Some think tanks tend to focus more on particular media, overlooking others. Think tanks efforts to engage media can be further complemented by better understanding of how media functions, keener awareness of timing, improved communication materials. As media is increasingly undertaking their own policy-relevant research, new avenues of collaboration are perhaps emerging.*

**Finding 5: Think tank independence and policy influence**

Media was asked whether think tanks in Bangladesh are able to provide independent policy analysis.



Over 40% of the respondents 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' that think tanks are able to conduct independent policy research work. This is a striking figure, given that previous finding showed that think tanks are one of the main source of information for journalists. This probably implies that journalists are restricted when it comes to finding information, and relies on think tanks even if they know that the source may not be offering independent or objective information.



Journalists were asked to assess if think tanks in Bangladesh are playing an important role in terms of policy research, advocacy, and creating public fora that influences better policy. Over 50% of the respondents give neutral response. This is quite normal to get such a high percentage of neutral response for this question, given that there are numerous underlying considerations and parameters that need to be factored in when coming to a general assessment of this nature. However, 29% respondents agree that think tanks are able to influence polices with their work.

Key informants noted that journalists are keenly aware of which think tanks have acceptability and credibility among the people. Journalists are more likely to approach those think tanks for information. Journalists tend to be very critical of one man show think tanks. Some respondents noted that in order to get media's attention, some think tanks are often overly critical of government or its policies. Some journalists were critical of the donor

dependency of the think tanks and how the donors are influencing the ways think tanks are functioning and defining their research priorities.

Given that it was not possible to go deeper into the political dimension of the issues through the structured questionnaire, much emphasis was given on this issue during the key informant interviews. The following insights on political dynamics emerge:

The political nature of the interface between media and think tanks seems to have several dimensions. Firstly, the media appeared keenly aware of the any perceived political bias of the think tanks. Most of the respondents raised the issue of neutrality and politicisation of the think tanks. One journalist recounted the political inclination of more than two dozen think tanks in Bangladesh (i.e. he believes that all think tanks have varying levels of political inclination and none are totally independent per se). The more overtly politicized a think tank, the more critical the media seemed to be in terms of reliance, credibility and using it as a source of information. Nevertheless, journalists also acknowledged the inevitability of the scenario that think tanks in Bangladesh have some political bias. The second dimension seemed to indicate that media associated with some political ideology can often have closer link with similarly aligned think tanks and are more likely to use that media. Thus some media will obtain more quotes, sound bites, and give greater coverage to certain think tanks than others due to similar political ideologies. While this scenario may not be pervasive, it seemed to occur with some media and think tanks. A third dimension is that some political leaders establish think tanks or become closely associated with some think tanks mainly to get media attention and gain political capital. Their objective is mainly to create noise of within the political circles, leadership and beyond. These think tanks have very little substantive research work, if any. But they develop forte in generating wide coverage in media. Finally, some journalists observed that overtime think tanks sometimes can potentially politicize media. Think tanks with certain political bias proactively engage with some particular media houses in order to gain access and co-opt the media in their favor.

*Journalists demonstrate a keen awareness of any ideological inclinations or operational constraints (e.g. donor reliance, government interference) of the think tanks. While journalists acknowledge that it may be challenging for think tanks to operate with complete independence in a politically divisive and partisan context, they are more likely to engage with think tanks that have a reputation of operating with relative political and operational independence.*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

There are significant variations among think tanks in terms of quality and reputation. This makes interpreting journalists responses to the questionnaire and interviews sometimes difficult.

There is no doubting that in order to be influential think tanks must engage effectively and fruitfully with media. The research findings point to some clear recommendations. Think tanks must:

- Have dedicated communication staff who will track developments in media. Allow communication staff to coordinate and manage the relations with media, complementing the established networks that think tank top executives have with media. This delegation can facilitate the efforts to have sustained institutional relations with media.
- Build longer term sustained relations with broader base of media instead of focusing on a limited section.

- Develop a clearer sense of how media functions and what are media's needs and requirements in terms of information, analysis and communication materials.
- Maintain updated websites with latest content and research outputs, as journalists are more likely to use web-sites for secondary research and references. Introduce social media to propagate research and engage with journalists.
- Give a special attention to media's needs when planning dissemination and advocacy programs. Prepare popular and short version of research papers and studies (media flare), which are more media-friendly. Develop a keen sense of timing, when working on a particular issue; develop acumen to anticipate issues that media could be interested in.
- Engage media representatives in different training and capacity building events. These can be thematic training (e.g. macro economy, climate change, human rights) and special sessions to orient journalists about think tanks research approaches, methodologies, etc.

Given the limited evidence on which to draw on, this study is exploratory in nature. It raises questions on the different dynamics of think tanks and media, and suggests areas where more work is warranted. Media is changing in dynamic ways. And in order to engage effectively, think tanks must continue to study these changes and understand their implications for think tanks. While this study strived to answer some questions, there are vast areas and opportunities of research that can shed light on some of the existing and emerging questions.

- How can the think tanks create demand for research and analysis among media that feeds in to policy discussions?
- How can the think tanks match the dynamic growth of media, i.e. keep pace with growing proliferation and influence of media on policy?
- Is media competitors of think tanks in terms of trying to influence policies, as more and more media are undertaking own research? What are the potential areas of collaboration and complementarity?

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