

## Exploring Social Media and E-Communication Patterns Among Indigenous Youth in Sri Lanka

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### ABSTRACT

*Social media and other digital technology use has skyrocketed in Sri Lanka and around the world, especially among marginalized youth groups like Indigenous communities. This study delves into the intricate interplay of social media and electronic communication (E-communication) patterns within the context of indigenous youth in Sri Lanka. As globalization and technological advancements continue to reshape traditional sociocultural landscapes, indigenous communities find themselves navigating an evolving digital terrain. This study aims to elucidate the patterns of engagement among this demographic, focusing on their preferences and behaviors in the digital realm. This paper examines the published literature to learn about how Indigenous youth in Sri Lanka use digital technologies and social media, as well as the positive and negative effects this has on their lives. This quantitative study on Sri Lanka's indigenous youth employed simple random sampling and an online questionnaire survey with 110 respondents, revealing insights into their social media and electronic communication behaviors, and was conducted using a descriptive research design and a sample of 36 respondents. The research findings suggest that even though the indigenous youth have less access to social media and digital technology, there are many ways social media affects their daily activities. Growing the population and other advancements have increased the usage of social media and other devices among the youth indigenous population in Sri Lanka. It is anticipated that the findings will provide valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and community leaders, fostering a more holistic approach to digital inclusion that respects the unique needs and aspirations of indigenous youth in Sri Lanka.*

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### 1. Introduction

People of all ages now have more ways than ever to connect, share, communicate, remark, post, download, and upload due to the proliferation of social media programmes. Adolescents, as reported in the literature (Weerasundera, 2014; Allen et al., 2014), are heavy users of this technology. Knowles et al. (2014) claim that among indigenous youth, too, the influence of social media has become permanent. Moreover, social media and e-communication have quickly replaced face-to-face communication as the primary mode of communication among young people worldwide. This is also true in Sri Lanka, where social media use is increasing. However, little research has been conducted to determine the extent to which Indigenous youth in Sri Lanka use social media and electronic communication. Indigenous youth constitute a sizable proportion of the Sri Lankan population, and they have distinct needs and aspirations when it comes to technology.

The purpose of this research paper is to look into the use of social media and e-communication among indigenous youth in Sri Lanka. The study specifically aims to investigate the level of social media

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use and e-communication among indigenous people in Sri Lanka, investigate barriers to social media and e-communication usage among indigenous people in Sri Lanka, and identify the negative impact of social media and e-communication.

### **Literature review:**

#### ***Level of social media and e-communication usage in indigenous people in Sri Lanka***

According to a study conducted by the Foundation for Innovative Social Development (FISD), Indigenous youth in Sri Lanka use email and instant messaging extensively to communicate with friends and relatives living in other parts of the country (Foundation for Innovative Social Development, 2019). Furthermore, the study found that many Indigenous youth in Sri Lanka use Facebook and other social media platforms to connect with their peers and socialize. Indigenous youth can 'perform' their Indigenous identities online through the usage of media-sharing networks and content created by users like Facebook and YouTube (Healy, 2013).

Another study, Perera and Liyanage (2019), discovered that Indigenous communities in Sri Lanka have lower access to digital devices and the internet than non-Indigenous communities. However, the study found that Indigenous youth in Sri Lanka are more likely to use social media than traditional forms of communication. However, access to digital devices and the internet is lower among Indigenous communities in Sri Lanka than among non-Indigenous communities, which may be a barrier to their use of social media and e-communication.

It is also critical to recognize the potential impact of cultural norms and traditions on the use of these technologies by Indigenous youth in Sri Lanka. Some Indigenous communities in Sri Lanka, for example, may be more conservative when it comes to the use of social media and e-communication. Indigenous youth in Sri Lanka may find it difficult to use social media platforms and electronic communication tools that prioritize video calling and messaging.

#### ***Barriers to social media and e-communication usage in indigenous people in Sri Lanka***

There are several barriers to indigenous youth in Sri Lanka using social media. One of the most significant barriers in indigenous communities is a lack of access to technology and the internet. Many indigenous villages in Sri Lanka lack basic infrastructure and access to electricity, let alone internet connectivity, according to a study published in the International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research (Attanapola and Dassanayake, 2020).

Another impediment is a scarcity of localized content in indigenous languages. Many indigenous youths in Sri Lanka speak their own languages, such as Vedda or Tamil, and may be hesitant to use social media platforms in Sinhala, the majority language. As a result, they may be unable to fully participate in online discussions or gain access to information. Furthermore, indigenous youth face cultural barriers when it comes to using social media. Some indigenous communities may adhere to strict traditional norms and values when it comes to social media use. Some indigenous communities in Sri Lanka regard social media as a threat to their cultural identity and may discourage their youth from using it (Wijeratne and Gunasekara, 2019).

One potential impediment is a lack of internet and digital device access. According to Perera and Liyanage (2019), indigenous communities in Sri Lanka have lower access to digital devices and the internet than non-Indigenous communities. This can make it difficult for Indigenous youth to use social media and e-communication tools, especially in rural areas with limited infrastructure and connectivity. Another potential barrier is Indigenous youth's lack of digital literacy and skills. According to Bandara and Rodriguez (2019), many Indigenous children in Sri Lanka, particularly those living in rural areas, are unfamiliar with digital technologies. This could make it more difficult for Indigenous youth to use social media and other e-communication tools effectively and safely. Many Indigenous young people have been early adopters of new digital technologies, such as Smartphones, access can be difficult due to factors such as remoteness, socioeconomic status, family structure, education level, and employment status (Horgan et al., 2019). There is a significant number of indigenous youths that do not have access to technology at home (Kral, 2014; Horgan et al., 2019). This means they may have a lower level of digital literacy in some cases/geographies than in others (Horgan et al, 2019).

Cultural and linguistic barriers may also limit Indigenous youth's ability to use social media and electronic communication tools. Indigenous youth, for example, may speak in dialects or languages that are not supported by popular social media platforms. Furthermore, cultural norms and values may limit Indigenous youth's use of social media and e-communication tools, especially if they are perceived as threatening traditional cultural practises and beliefs. Furthermore, the potential risks and negative effects of social media and e-communication use, such as cyberbullying and exposure to inappropriate content, may act as a barrier to adoption among Indigenous youth (Fernando and Hewagamage, 2019).

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***Negative impacts of social media and e- communication***

Many Indigenous youth benefit from using social media, but there are also some drawbacks, such as cyberbullying, cybercrime, and the sharing of sexually explicit information among minors. There is a significant generational gap between young Indigenous people and their elders, who are often technologically illiterate, in many Indigenous communities (Edmonds et al., 2012). According to Kral (2014), modern methods of communicating via electronic devices have altered conventional methods of social contact. The ability of the elder generation to employ socially sanctioned techniques of conflict resolution and social control, such as gesture, sign, and look, is diminished as more and more communication takes place through written words. This means that cyberbullying can go on unchecked and lead to devastating effects like suicide if family members aren't aware of their children's or grandchildren's use of social media. Therefore, educational programmers are required to increase knowledge about social media use and the possible adverse impacts it can have on people, their loved ones, and their communities (Vaarzon-Morel, 2014). This includes opportunities for parents, adults, leaders in the community, and Elders in remote locations.

In addition, regardless of the obvious advantages it provides in communicating information and improving communication, it has been discovered that social media can have a negative impact on mental health. Nearly fifteen years ago, when such conversations were in their infancy, it was established that more time spent online was connected with fewer interactions with close friends and family members at home (Kraut et al., 1998).

Another negative effect of social media is the increased connectivity between people who live far apart, so that conflicts that were previously localized can spread as young people call, text, or inform kin in other locations about conflicts (Rice et al., 2016). Instant messaging and email are also popular methods of communication among Sri Lankan youth, including Indigenous youth. According to a study conducted by the Foundation for Innovative Social Development (FISD), Indigenous youth extensively use email and instant messaging to communicate with friends and relatives who live in other parts of the country (Fernando and Hewagamage, 2019).

**2. Method**

Simple random sampling was used to compile the data for this quantitative analysis. The young people of Sri Lanka's indigenous community were the focus of this investigation. This descriptive study primarily uses a questionnaire survey method to collect its primary data. In this study, 110 respondents were selected at random to fill out online questions concerning their social media and electronic communication habits. The surveys only contain closed-ended questions like those on a Likert scale. Upagade and Shende (2012) state that five-point Likert measures are widely employed in business research to evaluate attitudes, values, and behaviors. In addition, the questions are ordered in a way that serves the study goals and puts the responder in a mindset where they are ready to give honest answers. Paper questionnaires were delivered in-person and online to the sample population to collect the necessary data. This study employed a deductive method to collect data and look for explanations for already-known hypotheses in order to get closer to its ultimate goal: figuring out how much the young Indigenous population of Sri Lanka uses social media and electronic communication. The sample size of 36 was determined using a random process used by the researcher. The following criteria (Smith et al., 2002) were used to settle on a basic random sampling method that would provide each unit of the population an equal chance of being selected. Time and resources prevent us from employing other sampling methods like quota or deliberate sampling. Maximizing the number of people who fill out questionnaires is an important consideration for researchers (Collins and Hussey, 2003). Random sampling is a probabilistic technique for picking samples from non-proportional populations, as defined by Mugenda & Mugenda (2006).

**3. Result and Discussion**

The findings show that 11.1% of respondents are under the age of 18, 19.4% are between the ages of 19 and 21, 33.3% are between the ages of 22 and 24, 22.2% are between the ages of 25 and 27, and 13.9% are between the ages of 27 and 29. The results also show that the lower the age bracket (15–18 years), the lower the number of respondents involved in the study. The findings also show that the majority of respondents ranged in age from 22 to 24 years. As a result, the majority of respondents were clearly young.

**Access to devices**

According to the findings, more than half of the respondents (83.3%) have access to devices. Meanwhile, 11.1% of respondents do not have access to devices. On the other hand, only a small percentage

of respondents (5.6%) voted may be no. The assumption is that the majority of indigenous youth have access to devices.

#### **Type of device used**

According to the findings, slightly less than half of the respondents (36.1%) own a mobile phone. Meanwhile, 30.6% of respondents have laptop computers. Tablets are present in a significant amount (16.7%). At the same time, 11.1% of respondents own a smartphone. On the other hand, a small percentage of respondents (5.6%) own a computer.

#### **Favorite mode of communication**

According to the findings, slightly less than half of the respondents (38.9%) chose verbal communication as their preferred mode of communication. Meanwhile, 27.8% of respondents voted on written. Mobile texting is preferred by a sizable percentage (25%). Video conferencing, on the other hand, was preferred by a small percentage of respondents (8.3%).

#### **Mostly used web application**

According to the findings, slightly less than half of the respondents (47.2%) chose WhatsApp as their mostly used web application. Meanwhile, 19.4% of respondents voted on Facebook. Instagram is used by a sizable percentage (13.9%). Also, 8.3% voted on YouTube as their mostly used mobile application. The least number of respondents voted on LinkedIn and viber which is 5.6%.

According to the findings, more than half of the respondents (69.4%) use social media for studies. Meanwhile, 11.1% of respondents voted no. 19.4% of respondents voted may be no. The assumption is that the majority of indigenous youth use social media for studies.

#### **Provides benefits rather than drawbacks**

According to the findings, more than half of the respondents (52.8%) have strongly agreed on the statement that they feel social media provides benefits rather than drawbacks. Meanwhile, 25% of respondents are neutral on this. Also, 19.4% of the respondents voted on agree. On the other hand, least number of respondents (2.8%) disagreed to this statement.

#### **Believe in news sharing in social media**

According to the findings, (25%) strongly agreed on the statement that they believe in social media news. In addition, 19.4% of respondents were neutral, strongly disagreed, or agreed on this. However, 16.7% of those polled disagreed with the assertion.

#### **SM and E communication in making daily activities easier**

According to the findings, slightly less than half of the respondents (41.7%) agreed on the statement that social media and e communication is making daily activities easier. In addition, 33.3% of respondents strongly agreed on this. However, 19.4% of those polled were neutral with the assertion. At the same time, 2.8% voted on disagree and strongly disagree.

Accordingly, the above figure represents the results of the data regarding the barriers to access social media. The results revealed that financial barriers are the most common barrier faced by the young indigenous individuals that avoids them from using social media. Moreover, cultural impact represents 28% while less infrastructure is identified as a barrier by 19% of the total respondents while 14% that less knowledge as a barrier.

#### **Drawbacks of using social media**

According to the above figure, most of the respondents (44%) have agreed that using social media is a waste of time, while a 31% of the respondents viewed the drawback as less time spent with friends and family along with 25% of the respondents believed that it leads to less focus on studies.

#### **Descriptive statistics:**

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

	<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Feel provides benefits rather drawbacks	36	2.00	5.00	3.2222	.92924

Believe in news sharing in social media	36	1.00	5.00	3.1389	1.47654
SM and E communication in making daily activities easier	36	1.00	5.00	4.0000	.95618
Barriers to access social media	36	1.00	4.00	2.1389	1.15022
Drawbacks when using SM	36	1.00	3.00	1.8611	.86694
Valid N (listwise)	36				

The above table displays the descriptive statistics of the questions that have been used to assess the usage of social media by the young indigenous individuals in Sri Lanka. Hence, it is clear that SM and E communication has the highest mean of 4.0 and Drawbacks of SM with the lowest mean of 1.86.

### Summary of key findings:

According to the survey results, majority of the young people were between the age of 22-24 years old. Moreover, the study results revealed that majority of the respondents only use mobiles phones and have less access to smart devices such as smartphones and laptops. It is also evident that a higher number of respondents uses laptops than smartphones, which is a positive factor to consider. In terms of web apps, WhatsApp appears to be the most popular, as it is utilized by a large percentage of the people in Sri Lanka. This demonstrates that young indigenous people in Sri Lanka are heavy users of social media and messaging apps like WhatsApp and Facebook. One of the highlighting findings is that the survey results provide evidence that social media plays an important in the studies of the young people as well. In the meanwhile, social media platforms are found to make the daily activities of the young generation more convenient and easier as well. The mix responses of the respondents to the question of believing the news shared in social media shows that even though the respondents highly use different sources of social media in their daily life, they also have the knowledge and awareness to use the social media platforms wisely. Considering the drawbacks of using social media, the author found that the young generation, at certain times over use social media which leads to waste of time and leads to less focus on studies.

These statistics indicate a shifting global trend towards the use of social media platforms for communication and engagement, particularly among young individuals, including Indigenous Sri Lankans. The term "youth" commonly refers to individuals in the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, typically between puberty and 25 years old, although it is often used without a precise definition. In comparison to the general population of Sri Lanka, the Indigenous population is much younger, with a median age of 20 years instead of 35 years, and they tend to reside in smaller, remote communities with limited access to services, facilities, and opportunities.

## 4. Conclusions

The goal of this review was to examine the good and negative consequences of social media use, as well as impediments, among a specific target group: Indigenous young people. It has shown that social media can have a substantial impact on the lives of Indigenous adolescents despite difficulties with telecoms access and social disadvantages faced by many of these young people. Awareness and education on the negative uses and impacts of social media are necessary to protect Indigenous youth from further harm, especially those who are already at a disadvantage and more vulnerable.

With the help of social media, it may be possible to increase the participation of Indigenous youth in research, something that has proven challenging to accomplish in the past, and to conduct a more thorough examination of aspects of Indigenous youth thinking, particularly in identifying solutions to the problems that they face. The positive potential of social media in the lives of Indigenous youth must be maximized, and the bad consequences must be minimized, thus more research is needed to understand the linkages and determinants of use.

Social media use among young Sri Lankans, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, presents opportunities to close social, educational, and health gaps and to facilitate the sharing, expansion, celebration, and strengthening of identities; power and control; and community and family connections. It's important to remember that the gap between socioeconomic groups can widen thanks to social media (Boyd, 2009). Building better relationships and bridging the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people is an important goal of future research, as is exploring the possibility of incorporating social media into socially focused Indigenous programmers to increase participation and effective engagement.

**Future research:**

In the future, research efforts may be directed towards mitigating the negative impacts of social media on Indigenous youth, while also harnessing its potential to promote positive outcomes in their lives. Additionally, there is a need for research to investigate how social media can be effectively utilized in health promotion interventions, with the goal of reducing the gap of usage of social media between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth.

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