

# A STUDY ON HOW SOCIAL MEDIA RESHAPES THE WAY OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION IN SRI LANKA

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## Abstract

This study analyzed how social media reshapes the way of family communication in Sri Lanka. The Study had three Objectives. Those were to identify which kind of social media platforms Sri Lankan family members use to study how often Sri Lankan family members communicate with each other through social media and to understand how social media affect to communication in Sri Lankan family members. Research question of the study were, 1: Which social media platforms do Sri Lankan family members use in difference age groups? How often Sri Lankan family members communicate with each other's through social media? And 3: Do the social media enable family members in Sri Lanka to connect better with each other? Quantitative survey method used to get the results by 100 respondents (50 children and 50 parents). Participants of the survey were from 18 to 60 years old, of non-specific educational background or social class. The researcher used quantitative techniques with the help of tables, graphs, and charts to analyze the findings of the study. According to the results 97% of young people use social media platform for their day to day communication. Almost 93% of the respondents have responded that they are in touch with their family members every day through social media.

**Keywords:** Communication, Family, Social media, Sri Lanka.

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## 1. Introduction

Internet and social networks made our communication easier and faster. Nowadays, instead of calling our family members, we text them on Facebook or put a hash tag of their profiles in our tweets in order to share some information with them. The world has changed a lot in the past years. The rapid advances in technology and the changing of the communication channels have changed the way people work and, for many, Internet and mobile technology, the two most dynamic technological forces in modern information and communications technology, are converging into one ubiquitous mobile Internet service which will change our way of both doing business and dealing with our daily routine activities.

Social media include internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audio. Instant messaging apps are becoming popular among users due to its communication features. While talking about usage of instant messaging applications, we can take them into two categories that are apps for computer and apps for mobile devices. Such apps are Messenger, Viber, Skype, WhatsApp, Imo, Google Talk and WeChat (Curtis, 2013). Every person on Earth can be connected to any other person around the globe and share information between each other. McLuhan referred to this kind of a society so as to a global village because it is almost like everybody knows everybody, and everybody knows everybody else's business. In the electronic age people tend to explore everything and investigate everybody since every kind of knowledge became reachable and everybody's personal information is available. In this study, the researcher analyzed how social media reshapes the way a family communicates in Sri Lanka.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka's Annual Report 2019 (which offers a data driven analysis of the state of the economy) appears to have used these figures when it says internet penetration stood at 61.5 per 100 persons by end 2019. By the same date, there were 150.8 active mobile phone subscriptions per 100 persons (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2020). There were 10.90 million

internet users in Sri Lanka in January 2021. The number of Internet users in Sri Lanka increased by 800,000 between 2020 and 2021. Internet penetration in Sri Lanka stood at 50.8% in January 2021. There were 7.90 million social media users in Sri Lanka in January 2021. The number of social media users in Sri Lanka was equivalent to 36.8% of the total population in January 2021 (DataReportal,2021). Facebook, the most popular among them, was cited by 80% of internet users. It was followed by YouTube (67%), IMO (60%), WhatsApp (53%), Viber (41%) and Instagram (11%). Twitter and TikTok were both cited by 7% of the time, while LinkedIn and SnapChat was liked by 2% each (International Media Support, 2020).

Neil Postman said that a new medium does not add something; it changes everything (Postman, 1998). The internet inevitably changed human society and its communication. All the knowledge that society developed and gathered over the centuries of exploration and researching is nowadays available on the internet and everybody with an internet connection can access it. Above that, any two or more persons can connect with each other and share information, and that is why we may say that predictions about the Global Village McLuhan made thirty years ago became true.

Part of the challenge in investigating social media usage is therefore to form a better understanding of the complex internal and external contexts governing whether or not the adoption of social media makes changes for specific types of relationships, and for specific purposes such as facilitating and mapping conversational discourse within different social groups, regarding family as one of them. It is suggested that in order to expand the expediency of current literature that one strand of future research could include a broader analysis of social media practice among people (researcher would like to broaden age range to people from 15 to 60 years old) in order to establish how this may influence the identification and engagement of people through social media networks.

Families represent not only environments wherein their members live but also whole complex social systems (Broderick, 1993). Studies showed that higher collective family efficacy associates with higher family satisfaction, open communication, effective parental monitoring, and lower aggressive management of conflicts and communication problems (Bandura, 2011).

Information Communication Technology use can provide positive results in terms of family cohesion, adaptability, and open communications and can have a positive impact on family relationships too (Chesley, & Fox, 2012), by allowing family members to keep in touch, make plans in real-time, ensure children's safety as they allow communications in emergency situations (Devitt, & Roker, 2009), strengthen family ties, encourage parent -child interactions, and promote and facilitate discussions (Coyne, 2014). On the other hand, the connectedness allowed by mobile devices and social media needs to be negotiated in times, spaces, and occasions where it is allowed, and the chances to perpetually communicate need to be modulated (Huisman, 2012). A risk arising from the lack of modulation and negotiation about social media and mobile devices use, which could impact family relationships and dynamics, seems related to the phubbing phenomenon, i.e., ignoring someone in a social environment by paying attention to mobile devices instead (e.g., interrupting a meal while eating together to check the phone for messages or missed calls) (Bai, 2020).

After studying these literature reviews, researchers have decided to study how social media reshapes the way of family communication in Sri Lanka. The Study had three Objectives. Those were to identify which kind of social media platforms use Sri Lankan family members, to study how often Sri Lankan family members communicate with each other's through social media and to understand how social media affects communication in Sri Lankan family members. Research questions of the study were, 1: Which social media platforms were used by Sri Lankan family members in different age groups? 2: How often Sri Lankan family members communicate with each other's through social media? And 3: Does social media enable family members in Sri Lanka to connect better with each other?

## 2. Methodology

Quantitative survey method used to get the results by 100 respondents (50 children and 50 parents). Participants of the survey were from 18 to 60 years old, of non-specific educational background or social class. The researcher used non-probability sampling technique and sampling method was non-random sampling method. This questionnaire included close-ended questions combined with open-ended questions so the respondents could give more detailed and thorough answers. After collecting and analyzing the data, the results were divided according to the age of the participants. The researcher used quantitative techniques with the help of tables, graphs and charts to analyze the findings of the study.

## 3. Results & Discussion

Questionnaire used for this survey included a question about different social media people in Sri Lanka use. Values collected during this survey are presented in the following table. Respondents were familiar with most of the listed social media, however, the survey implied that Sri Lankan does not use Google+ and Snapchat quite often, and they are not particularly fond of Flickr, especially the older generations. The oldest group of respondents does not use LinkedIn as much as the younger ones. Moreover, Imo and WhatsApp find a lot more users among the younger population of Sri Lanka as well as Facebook.

Table 1: Social Media Platforms the Respondents use

	Facebook	Imo	WhatsApp	Viber	Google+	Snapchat	Twitter	Instagram	LinkedIn
Children	73%	52%	48%	27%	3%	6%	17%	22%	12%
Parents	23%	17%	26%	20%	2%	2%	7%	3%	2%

Source: Researcher's survey results, 2021

Survey showed that Sri Lankan use social media platforms to communicate with each other on a daily basis. The sample of 100 respondents revealed that 72 respondents, which are 72%, communicate via social media every day. Most of them use social media to communicate with their friends, especially when it comes to the younger generations. Anyhow, the researcher here focused on the communication between the family members exclusively. First of all, the researcher wanted to emphasize the strong bonds between family members in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the following chart will describe how often do families members communicate, without specifying the tools of communication they use.

Table 2: How Often the Respondents Communicate With Their Family Members

	Few Times A Month	Few Times A Week	Every Day
Children	1%	2%	72%
Parents	0%	2%	19%

Source: Researcher's survey results, 2021

The researcher wanted to investigate to which extensions do these every day communications between parents and children include social media. Younger people are better socially connected and understand how social media function much better than the older groups. They have more online friends and in the most cases they use social media for fun or researching their interests. Considering that, it is understandable why the survey showed that older respondents mostly use professional social networks, and younger ones prefer those who provide entertainment and interesting contents. Answers from the questionnaire have shown that 72% of children use social

media for communication on a daily basis. This question does not specify who they communicate with, so this communication includes not only family members, but friends, colleagues and acquaintances as well. This confirms the theoretical framework the researcher used as a foundation for this research, that social media reshaped communication in Sri Lanka.

Further questions will investigate whether using social media influences communication between family members as well, or it remained focused on traditional communication tools. Participants were first asked how often they communicate with their parents or children. Communication tools which were used on those occasions were not specified as the researcher attempted to investigate only how frequent respondents' communication with their family members. Therefore, it may be concluded that interpersonal relations between the family members in Sri Lanka are very intensive and tight, even in the era of the reign of internet and social media. Nonetheless, the existence of strong bonds between parents and children was confirmed while this survey was being conducted, hence the researcher wanted to investigate whether social media initiated better communication and strengthened relations among family members in Sri Lanka. In order to achieve that, the following questions in the questionnaire were focusing on the impact the respondents think social media have on their relations with their family.

Table 3. Number of Social Media Profiles a Respondent Has

	No social media profiles	1 or 2 social media profiles	3-5 social media profiles	More than 5 social media profiles
Children	2%	64%	51%	19%
Parents	4%	32%	8%	2%

Source: Researcher's survey results, 2021

As the study have shown, only 2% of children in Sri Lanka do not use any social media platforms, which leads to the simple conclusion that 98% of people have at least one social network profile. Out of the 98% of young who are social media users, significant 51% stands for those people who use from three to five different social media platforms. And if we pay attention to those who use social media platforms, we realize that half of them only have one or two social media profiles. They believe that social media are bringing a negative impact on the society. The questionnaire pointed Facebook as the most frequently used social media platform. Facebook is almost equal with WhatsApp and Imo. Besides Facebook, the youngest respondents emphasize use of WhatsApp, Imo and Viber. They have more online friends and in the most cases they use social media for fun or researching their interests. Considering that, it is understandable why the survey showed that older respondents mostly use professional social networks, and younger ones prefer those who provide entertainment and interesting contents. The researcher attempted to investigate only how frequent respondents' communication with their family members.

When the oldest group of respondents of this survey comes in question, the situation changes fundamentally. If we pay attention to those who use social media platforms, we realize that more than half of them only have one or two social media profiles. These numbers are a reflection of the general attitude older generations of Sri Lankan still devotedly cultivate. Low percent of older respondents who use social media actively demonstrates mistrust they have toward modern tools of communication and connecting people.

Table 4. Changers occurred in communication with Social Media

	We Communicate More	Nothing Has Changed	We Communicate Less
Children	60%	10%	1%
Parents	20%	6%	3%

Source: Researcher's survey results, 2021

Table 4 showed that how change Sri Lankan family communication with social media. Since the questionnaire made the participants think about social media more thoroughly, it set a suitable background for posing a question about respondents' opinion on the impact social media have on their family relations. Therefore, the questionnaire closes with the question that asks do the respondents communicate with their family members more often since they have started using social media. For 16% of all respondents nothing has changed, or at least they perceive the current situation in that way. Majority of the respondents, significant percentage of 80%, claimed that they have started communicating more with their family members since they have started using social networks. Only 4% of all respondents have noticed deterioration in a daily communication with their families. What must be emphasized while discussing these results, it is the fact that most of the negative responses to this question belong to the older age groups. These findings speak in favor of the cultural background of Sri Lankan society that has been presented in the introduction. Sri Lankans, especially older members of the society, still express doubt and rejection to the innovations in form of social media platforms. Nevertheless, the situation is changing, that is inevitable, according to the findings of this research which are revealing that the majority of Sri Lankan parents have already started to use social media for communicating with their closest family members.

### **Conclusion**

The electronic age brought to us speed and numerous sources of information, but simultaneously disabled us to develop honest, truthful relationships, and to keep our attention on one topic for long period of time. The questionnaire pointed Facebook as the most frequently used social media platform in Sri Lanka. Parents in Sri Lanka, Facebook is almost equal with WhatsApp and Imo, which may imply that the older respondents use social media primarily for work. The survey has affirmed that most of the time family members communicate between themselves the communication is conducted through social media platforms.

People make millions for adding a well-chosen hashtag, and not for the content of their tweets or Facebook statuses. Forget the fuel, banks and real estate, marketing and social media are the businesses that are going to make world rise or collapse in the years that follow. The electronic age brought us speed and numerous sources of information, but simultaneously disabled us to develop honest, truthful relationships, and to keep our attention on one topic for long period of time. We are now faster, more clever, maybe even smarter and more apprehensive, but, at the same time, more socially maladjusted, less focused and more alienated.

Social media has drastically changed how we communicate. Not too long ago, we communicated through the mail, on a land-line telephone, and in person. Today, we send text messages; leave voice messages; use instant messenger; send emails; talk through headphones, cell phones, and online video phones; and, of course, interact through the internet where a plethora of social media tools has redefined communication. That model is collectively called social media (also referred to as Web 2.0). These communication tools gave us power to reach anyone any time we want. Social media enabled us to strengthen bonds we have with our friends and families. Therefore, social media could be the savior of the family closeness and strong, healthy relationships.

Internet is just like any other sort of power, it can be used for good or for evil. It depends on every single one of us whether we will use it for destruction or creation. From that point of view, there are no fundamental differences between post mail and social media. Mailing was used to disturb and ignore someone as well as to show love, compassion and care. As Marshall McLuhan said, the medium is the message; therefore, the impact internet will have on the world lies in the hands of its users. You are the medium, be aware of and responsible for the message you represent.

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