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Prof. R.C.K. Hettiarachchi
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Authors

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Media Policy Formation and Regulatory Transformation: Assessing Media Reforms in Sri Lanka.

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Community Radio as a Lifeline: Strengthening Communities through Health Awareness During COVID-19 in India Psychological Perspective).

3. Nayana Suraweera
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Mass Media
Sri Palee campus, University of Colombo

The Role of Group Communication in Establishing the Concept of God in Sri Lankan Society (With special reference to Dedimnda Deviyo in Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya in Kegalle District).

4. Nirosha Neranjala Dissanayake
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Impact of Virtual Reality-Based Social Media Platforms on Social Interactions (A Study from a Psychological Perspective).

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The Analysis of Film Language in Dream Sequences.

Preface

In the current environment, the media is all around us. It gives shape to how we receive information and determines how we think interact and function in a society. As technology advances and new platforms emerge, the impact of media on human behavior, policy-making, cultural identity, and social organization has become more complicated and widespread. Expanding media research is both timely and necessary. Media studies now go beyond simple content analysis; they provide important tools to understand the power dynamics, representation, and participation that drive communication in society.

The media landscape in any country is crucial for educating its citizens about important issues, including public health, social justice, cultural preservation, and digital literacy. It serves not just as a source of information but also as a space where people learn to manage crises, engage in democratic discussions, and envision new possibilities. Therefore, it is essential for scholars, practitioners, and citizens to grasp how media functions in different cultural, technological, and regulatory settings.

The International Journal of Communicology, Volume 6, August 2024, contains a selection of articles that reflect this line of inquiry. As Editor-in-Chief, I am pleased to present a volume that showcases the dynamic relationship between media and society, drawing on various perspectives and solid research.

The volume opens with the article "Media Policy Formation and Regulatory Transformation: Assessing Media Reforms in Sri Lanka" by Prof. Pradeep N' Weerasinghe, which offers a critical analysis of the evolving media regulatory landscape in the country, grounded in solid research. This paper tracks the progression of media policy from its post-independence beginnings to current digital governance. It examines the tensions between media freedom and state intervention, as well as commercial interests,

especially in light of recent legal reforms and changes in institutions. The study raises significant questions about media institutions' independence, journalistic ethics, and the need for a clear and accountable regulatory framework. Weerasinghe's work provides both historical context and guidance for future media governance in Sri Lanka.

The second article, "Community Radio as a Lifeline: Strengthening Communities through Health Awareness During COVID-19 in India" by Prof. Ankuran Dutta, draws on fieldwork and policy analysis to explore how community radio stations responded to the pandemic across India. Highlighting case studies from Assam and other rural areas, the study shows how locally produced broadcasts in regional languages shared crucial information about hygiene, vaccination, and mental health. Community radio is not just an alternative media platform but also a participatory space that empowers marginalized groups and builds resilience during crises. Prof. Dutta's research reinforces the ongoing importance of community media in public service and grassroots development.

The third article, "The Role of Group Communication in Establishing the Concept of God in Sri Lankan Society," Dr. Nayana Suraweera explores cultural communication and spiritual beliefs. Through an ethnographic study of the Dedimunda Deviyo cult in Aluth Nuwara Devalaya, this article investigates how group rituals, oral stories, and media representation come together to strengthen religious beliefs in local communities. Suraweera emphasizes how collective memory and spiritual identity are preserved and passed on, particularly within rural Sri Lankan traditions. The study highlights how group communication shapes worldviews and keeps community ties strong through sacred stories and symbolic actions.

The fourth article, Dr. Nirosha Neranjala Dissanayake's thorough study titled "Impact of Virtual Reality-Based Social Media Platforms on Social Interactions: A Study from a Psychological Perspective." This article looks at how immersive

digital spaces, including virtual reality environments and social media chatrooms, are changing personal relationships, especially for Sri Lankan migrant workers overseas and their families at home. Using both quantitative data and in-depth interviews, Dr. Dissanayake shows that platforms like Skype, Imo, and WeChat function as more than just communication tools; they act as emotional lifelines. The study also discusses topics like digital isolation, trust-building in virtual environments, and the psychological effects of reduced in-person interactions. Her work provides valuable insights into the social and therapeutic possibilities of virtual media, based on the uses and gratifications theory.

Finally, "The Analysis of Film Language in Dream Sequences" by D.C.V. Fernando, explores the intersections of cinema, psychoanalysis, and semiotics. It focuses on three acclaimed films—Shutter Island, Amour, and Hacksaw Ridge—and examines how dream sequences serve as visual symbols for unconscious desire, trauma, and identity. Using Freudian and Jungian dream theories, the article breaks down how filmmakers use mise-en-scène, sound design, and narrative structure to express complex psychological states. This research adds to an underexplored area of Sri Lankan cinema studies and encourages new analytical approaches to understanding symbolic storytelling in global film.

Together, these five articles capture the essence of communicology: an academic effort to understand how communication shapes meaning, identity, power, and belonging in society. Each article has its own methodology and focus, yet they all share a common theme—the vital role of media in shaping human experience.

I want to thank the contributing authors for their intellectual effort and commitment, the peer reviewers for their constructive feedback, and the editorial committee for their steady support throughout the publication process. I also appreciate the Centre for Media Research at Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo,

for its ongoing assistance, and the University of Colombo Press for making this issue available in print. A special thank you goes to Mr. Dinuka Malinda Herath for his creative input on layout and design.

This issue demonstrates the vitality of media research and its relevance in our world. I hope it will inspire further scholarship, reflection, and conversation across different fields and borders.

Prof. R.C.K. Hettiarachchi
Editor-in-Chief
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Table of Content

Media Policy Formation and Regulatory Transformation: Assessing Media Reforms in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The rapidly evolving media landscape shaped by technological advancements, shifting media ownership structures, and emerging democratic practices necessitates transformative policies and regulations to cultivate an informed and empowered citizenry. In Sri Lanka, this need aligns with the discourse on "System Change," a concept galvanized by the Galle Face Struggle of 2020, the nation's most transformative political movement since independence. This movement has ignited hopes for comprehensive political and governance reforms, emphasizing the importance of enhanced media freedom, a stronger media industry, and informed, critical citizenship to support political reform, societal development, and accountable governance. A robust democracy depends on media pluralism, diversity, editorial independence, accountability, and transparency to ensure equitable access to information and diverse perspectives. However, while the significance of media reforms in strengthening democracy is widely acknowledged in Sri Lanka, substantial challenges persist. This study addresses critical questions: What outcomes have emerged from past media reform efforts? What policies and reforms are essential? What trends and contextual barriers obstruct progress? The findings reveal a persistent recognition of the need to reform the media landscape, yet limited progress has been made. Key obstacles

include the dominance of media owners, weak journalist unions, low professional standards, a lack of confidence in reform implementation, limited political will to serve public interests, insufficient civil society interest in media reforms, and inadequate media literacy among civil society and citizens. These challenges have stalled the development and implementation of effective media policies, ultimately hindering efforts to strengthen democracy in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Media and Democracy, Media Policy and Regulations, Media Reforms, Media Pluralism, Media Transparency, Sri Lanka*

Introduction

The media landscape in Sri Lanka, shaped by technological advancements and shifting ownership structures, requires urgent policy reforms to support an informed and engaged citizenry. This need for transformation has gained prominence within the broader discourse on "System Change," particularly following the Galle Face Struggle of 2020, the country's most significant political movement since independence. This movement sparked widespread calls for political and governance reforms, with media freedom, a strengthened media industry, and informed citizenship identified as key elements for advancing political reform, societal development, and accountable governance.

In academic discussions, media reforms are often analyzed through the lens of public interest and media power. Freedman (2014) explores media policy and activism, emphasizing the potential of reforms to shift media practices toward serving the public interest. Similarly, Losey (2016) argues that media policy plays a crucial role in challenging dominant media power structures and promoting democratic ideals. The Montenegro Media Institute (2023) underscores the significance of media activism in protecting the public interest, with a focus on structural reforms and media policy changes. Fenton and

Freedman (2020) offer international perspectives on successful media reform strategies, particularly those that prioritize public interest and democratic governance.

In Sri Lanka, Jayawardena and Gunatilleke (2015) have highlighted that state media reforms are often shaped by political expediency, while Weerasinghe (2009) criticizes the lack of clear policies governing the broadcasting sector. The National Secretariat for Media Reforms (2016) calls for overdue structural and legal reforms, noting the importance of both internal self-reflection within the media industry and legislative changes to address the challenges faced. Achieving these reforms, however, necessitates political will and broad support across political parties.

Despite the recognized need for reforms, obstacles remain in Sri Lanka's media landscape, including media ownership monopolies, weak journalistic unions, and insufficient political commitment. This study examines the progress of past media reforms in Sri Lanka, the necessary policy interventions, and the barriers to effective change, aiming to assess how media reforms can strengthen the country's democracy and foster greater accountability and transparency. Thus, this study addresses critical questions: What outcomes have emerged from past media reform efforts? What policies and reforms are essential? What trends and contextual barriers obstruct progress?

Literature Review

There has been a dramatic increase in citizen awareness of and concern for issues within the media reform arena. These issues range from public interest, fairness, impartiality and pluralism in media ownership to diversity of media content, freedom of expression, editorial independence, media transparency, accountability, justice, and media ownership regulation. Buckley et al. (2011) argue that ownership inherently implies a degree of potential control and can be a significant obstacle to pluralism

and diversity. The structure of media ownership is crucial and dramatically impacts the pluralism, diversity, transparency, and accountability of the media (Pickard, 2020). Weerasinghe (2023) highlights that ensuring such conditions allows citizens to participate in and make informed decisions about a country's democratic processes, as well as their private lives, social interactions, market activities, and elections.

The National Secretariat for Media Reforms (2016) notes a lack of evidence supporting the existence of state policies specifically aimed at promoting media pluralism and diversity in Sri Lanka. Added, there is no independent regulatory body in the broadcasting sector mandated to foster pluralism, diversity, public interest, editorial independence, transparency, accountability, justice, ownership regulation, or spectrum management.

UNESCO and CBA (2006) assert that to guarantee a wide range of independent and autonomous media in the broadcasting sector, it is essential to implement adequate and proportionate regulation. Such regulation serves to protect media freedom while balancing other legitimate rights and interests. They emphasize the need for an independent regulator for broadcasting.

Jayaratne and Kellapotha (2015), focusing on Sri Lanka, argue that independent broadcasting authority legislation should explicitly state the public's right to receive information and opinions on matters of public interest. It should also ensure the principle of maintaining a fair balance of alternative views.

Weerasinghe (2023) further contends that Sri Lanka's broadcasting landscape has developed without policies, laws, or regulations tailored to the country's socioeconomic and cultural needs. The social diversity of the country and the communication needs of its people are not adequately represented in the electronic media landscape. For instance, in the early 1990s, the government licensed the private sector to establish radio and television stations without first implementing appropriate policies, laws, or an independent electronic media regulatory body. This lack of regulation and oversight has left significant gaps

in ensuring media pluralism, diversity, and accountability in Sri Lanka. Nangia (2011) suggests that freedom of information and expression, along with a robust mix of broadcasting ownership models commonly referred to as commercial, public service, and community broadcasting—are critically important for developing and sustaining an informed and engaged society. Buckley et al. (2011) highlight that broadcasting holds an enormous influence over social, cultural, and political life in nearly all parts of the world.

The National Secretariat for Media Reforms (2016) notes that in Sri Lanka, there is no legal guarantee of editorial independence. There are no licensing requirements mandating editorial impartiality and fairness. In privately owned media organizations, it is common for owners or managers to interfere with news coverage and commentary to suit their political and/ or commercial interests. Similarly, in state-owned media, which are not true public service outlets, it is a common practice for ruling party politicians to determine news coverage, emphasis, and commentary in their favor. Jayaweera (2016) emphasizes the need for a mechanism to safeguard editorial independence from interference, whether it comes from the government, media owners, or external entities. The National Secretariat for Media Reforms (2016) also points out that all broadcasters use the electromagnetic spectrum, which is public property with the state serving as its custodian. When only a few companies have access to this spectrum, it limits market-based competition, potentially leading to monopolistic practices. Weerasinghe (2023) adds that Sri Lankan television and radio stations are predominantly owned by the government and a small group of Colombo-centered business elites.

Buckley et al. (2011) point out that in the context of competing interests among various stakeholders, a public interest approach aims to ensure that the welfare of the public as a whole remains central in the formulation and implementation of legal policies and the regulatory environment for the media. Recent years have documented tremendous growth in policymaking

activities within the media policy and media reforms arena. The increasing prominence of activism and advocacy work in this space underscores the need for scholarship that examines these activities, places them in broader historical and theoretical contexts, and assesses the structure and behavior of the organizations involved. Jolly (2007) suggested that a deregulatory media ownership regime could benefit both the media and the public. Media organizations would be released from restrictions, while public interest would be served through the proliferation of media sources and outlets, thereby enhancing diversity in information and entertainment. Similarly, Weerasinghe (2023) argues that public welfare and well-being are intrinsically tied to public interest. He links public good theory to welfare economics, suggesting that laws, regulations, and institution-building that balance market competition with public welfare can maximize benefits for the public and provide essential protections.

UNESCO's Media Development Indicators emphasize that media can best contribute to and benefit from good governance and democratic development by focusing on freedom of expression, pluralism, and diversity. Jayaweera (2016) adds that media development should not be measured solely by the number of media outlets available. Instead, it should be understood in terms of the media's ability to challenge societal inequalities and create a more democratic and inclusive public sphere through the dissemination of quality information. To achieve these goals, legislative and policy reforms are essential. Similarly, Weerasinghe (2016) observes that the Sri Lankan media landscape has grown in an ad hoc manner, with government and corporate ownership controlling the media without a coherent vision of the media's role in national development. Added, clear media policies and structural reforms are vital to strengthen democracy and support the political reforms currently being implemented in the country.

Jolly (2007) notes that the gradual deregulation of media in the United States included the dissolution of the fairness doctrine, an important component of media's public interest trusteeship.

The fairness doctrine required broadcasters to provide equal opportunities for the presentation of all viewpoints in news, interviews, and documentaries. Shmykova (n.d.) highlights that ownership structure, as a key organizational factor, significantly affects the content of mass media messages. As a primary source of political information, mass media can influence public behavior during elections. Ownership of broadcasting media is often divided among commercial interests, political or government interests, and public interests.

Many academics have been interested in evaluating media reforms. For example, Freedman (2014) analyzes media power through the lens of media policy and activism, offering valuable insights into how reforms can shift media practices to align with public interest ideals. Losey (2016) discusses the role of media policy in challenging media power structures and advancing the public interest through media reform. The Montenegro Media Institute (2023) examines how media activism is crucial for protecting the public interest in the media, focusing on structural reforms, policy changes, and media content practices across different countries. Fenton and Freedman (2020) present Strategies for Media Reform: International Perspectives, which provides global examples of successful media reform strategies, including advocacy campaigns aimed at ensuring media policies prioritize public interest and democracy. Napoli (2007) suggests that future research should engage in long-term assessments of media reform issues. The term media reform encompasses the concerns of citizen groups and public interest organizations seeking to improve media system performance and shape media policy.

Jayawardena and Gunatilleke (2015) examined media reforms in Sri Lanka and noted that state policy on media law reforms has often been dictated by expediency and bargaining between media industry bodies and the government in power. Weerasinghe (2009) argues that Sri Lanka's broadcasting industry developed without clear policies, laws, or regulations, negatively impacting the country's democracy and development

process. The National Secretariat for Media Reforms in Sri Lanka (2016) highlights that structural and legal reforms in the media sector are long overdue. Some of these reforms must originate from within the media profession and industry through serious self-reflection, while others require legislative changes and state policy interventions. Achieving these reforms necessitates political will and support from all political parties.

Mitnick (1980) defines regulation as the public administrative policing of private activity based on rules prescribed in the public interest. Public interest obligations should be imposed on holders of broadcast licenses to ensure that some of the significant profits generated are used for producing informative and high-quality content. However, Cooper (n.d.) notes the limits of these policies due to the immense power of commercial mass media. Ownership limits, he suggests, should be part of a broader framework for media reform. Buckley et al. (2011) emphasize that a public interest approach to media policy focuses on strengthening the media's contribution to good governance, accountability, participatory communication for development, cultural pluralism, and social agency.

Based on the literature, it is evident that the media industry in Sri Lanka requires reforms centered on public interest. Further investigation is necessary to strengthen democracy and ensure media's role in fostering strengthening the democracy, good governance and social development.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine and synthesize literature, reports, and documents focused on the origins, practices, and theoretical frameworks of media reform and public interest advocacy. In addition to these secondary sources, the research incorporates the personal experience and insights of the researcher, who has been actively involved in media reform activism. The primary aim is to explore

the evolution of media development, with a particular emphasis on public interest advocacy and its role in reshaping media institutions and practices in Sri Lanka.

A historical review methodology is employed to analyze the role of public interest advocacy and activism within the media reform sector, specifically concerning Sri Lanka's broadcasting system. This approach is informed by the work of scholars such as Carter and Green (2015), Baker (2007), Zaharopoulos (2012), Mendel (2011), and Curran and Seaton (2003), who utilized historical document reviews to investigate media policy reforms. Key terms such as "media reform," "media policy," "media deregulation," "public interest," and "fairness doctrine" (Cambridge University Press, 2020; Wu, 2018; Jayaweera, 2016) were used to locate and analyze a variety of relevant materials, including academic articles, government reports, NGO's reports, nonprofit advocacy documents, newspaper articles, and dissertations.

The scope of this paper focuses on key dimensions of media development, particularly efforts to reform media institutions. Themes such as freedom of expression, editorial independence, media pluralism and diversity, transparency and accountability, media democracy, and media justice are central to the analysis. Public interest, as a guiding concept, provides a framework for understanding the challenges and opportunities within the Sri Lankan media landscape.

To ensure a coherent analysis, the term "media reform" has been used as the primary reference point to integrate these various dimensions. This approach allows for a comprehensive assessment of the efforts and activities aimed at strengthening the media's role in democratic governance and public interest advocacy. By synthesizing existing literature and reviewing a diverse range of sources, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of media reform initiatives and the corresponding responses by governments, media institutions, and practices in Sri Lanka, contributing to the broader discourse

on media development and democratic media reform.

Discussion

Citizen Interest and Demand for Mass Media Reform

Sri Lanka boasts a literacy rate of approximately 93.3%. However, debates persist regarding the accuracy of this figure, as the criteria used to measure literacy often overlook critical dimensions. In particular, the levels of critical thinking and active political and civic participation among Sri Lankan citizens remain unsatisfactory. While officers, politicians, professionals, civic activists and opinion leaders are visibly engaged in societal discourse, the majority of citizens remain largely passive.

A key factor contributing to this passivity is the lack of media literacy and critical thinking skills. Many citizens engage with media as passive consumers rather than as active participants. They are largely unaware of the underlying structures of media ownership, the agendas driving media narratives, and the processes by which media content is created. This passive consumption resembles a sponge-like absorption of media content, which often aligns with the perceived needs and preferences of the audience, as dictated by media producers. Consequently, citizens frequently fall victim to media messages without the ability to critically analyze or question them, let alone shape the content to reflect their needs.

These issues are intrinsically linked to the concepts of critical citizenship and media literacy. The media's influence is amplified by its attractiveness, prominence, and association with elite power structures. Many people perceive benefits from engaging with the current media industry due to its widespread popularity and perceived authority.

Additionally, the advent of social media and the Internet has created a paradoxical trust in media content: while these

platforms provide diverse information sources, they also foster an environment of ambivalence, fake news, disinformation, and misinformation. The overwhelming demand for entertainment content and the addictive nature of social media have further stifled the development of a civic-minded media culture. Instead of advocating for media reform, citizens remain complacent with the content they receive. This lack of demand is compounded by the absence of organized pressure groups advocating for change.

In conclusion, the deficiency of media literacy and the absence of a critically engaged citizenry have significantly hindered public influence and intervention in media reform efforts in Sri Lanka. Addressing these challenges is essential for fostering a more informed and participatory society.

Civil Society and Media Reforms

Civil society in Sri Lanka is vibrant and comprises non-profit NGOs and welfare-based voluntary associations. While NGOs are typically owned and operated by English-educated urban elites, voluntary associations are managed by elected officials. The agendas of these groups are influenced by their leadership. NGO projects are often dictated by the priorities of international funding organizations, whereas voluntary associations focus on addressing the welfare needs of specific community groups.

Despite the numerous projects undertaken by NGOs, their impact is often limited due to a lack of sustainable development strategies. As a result, while the quantity of NGO projects may be significant, their tangible outcomes are minimal and frequently invisible. Similarly, voluntary organizations are constrained by their narrow focus on welfare and lack broader societal influence.

Most citizens engage with these organizations as passive participants. NGOs, like voluntary associations, rely on media for publicity—to showcase their projects, elevate their leaders, and build social capital. However, this dependency on

media discourages NGOs from challenging the undemocratic ownership structures and practices of media organizations. NGOs appear reluctant to advocate for media reform, fearing it might jeopardize the publicity they currently enjoy. Consequently, their involvement in promoting media reform is minimal.

A few notable NGOs have engaged with the media sector:

1. The National Secretariat for Media Reform (NSMR)

This organization is a leading advocate for media reform in Sri Lanka. It conducts studies, makes recommendations, and lobbies for changes to ensure that media serves a democratic society effectively. It emphasizes the importance of legislative reforms to advance media development in the country.

2. The Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA)

CPA has long championed media freedom, often using judicial avenues to counter government interference. It has conducted research on media freedom, media behavior during elections, and the media's role in ethnic conflicts.

3. The Marga Institute

A pioneering institution in civil society interventions in the media, the Marga Institute focuses on studies and training related to ethnicity, democracy, and media ethics. It has also managed initiatives such as the Youkthiya newspaper and has promoted media freedom.

4. Verité Research

This organization analyzes media ethics through weekly reports and aims to promote self-regulation within the media sector. Its approach often involves publicly highlighting unethical practices to encourage accountability. Verité also maintains a website documenting media ownership and transparency in Sri Lanka, enabling civil society and citizens to better understand the need for media reform.

5. The Sri Lanka Press Institute

This NGO focuses on developing newspaper journalism, including training journalists in press ethics and minimizing harm caused by irresponsible reporting. It has established the Press Complaints Commission to encourage self-regulation among its member newspapers.

6. The Sri Lanka Development Journalism Association

This organization works in areas such as media ethics, journalist training, and promoting development-oriented journalism.

Journalists' Organizations and Media Reform in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka lacks strong, independent professional unions for journalists. Private media institution owners often discourage or outright block the formation of unions, while unions in state-owned media are frequently aligned with political parties. These unions prioritize political agendas over addressing the broader interests of journalists.

The Producers' Association of State-Owned Media Institutions is one notable trade union that has made efforts to advocate for journalists' rights. Similarly, the Free Media Movement (FMM), a long-standing advocate for media freedom, operates as a quasi-professional association. However, its structural limitations restrict its membership to a small group. Despite these challenges, the FMM has been vocal in opposing government interference in media freedom.

Other professional associations, such as the Sri Lanka Journalists' Association, Working Journalists' Association, Muslim Journalists' Association and Tamil Journalists' Association have emerged over the years. However, their objectives and activities have largely failed to address meaningful media reform, limiting their overall impact on systemic issues within the industry.

Journalists and their trade unions have the potential to play a pivotal role in media reform by advocating for freedom of expression and fair industry practices. Unfortunately, several barriers hinder their active involvement:

1. Media Ownership Constraints

Media ownership structures often restrict the activities of journalists' unions, preventing them from effectively pushing for reforms.

2. Self-Preservation

Concerned about job security, many journalists avoid challenging the status quo, further discouraging engagement with structural reforms.

3. Lack of Awareness

A significant portion of journalists remains unaware of the nuances and importance of media reform and editorial independence, limiting their capacity to advocate for meaningful change.

4. Perceived Advantages of the Status Quo

Some journalists view the existing media structure as advantageous, reducing their motivation to demand reforms.

As a result of these factors, journalists' organizations and trade unions in Sri Lanka have demonstrated limited interest in initiating or supporting media reform initiatives.

Media Ownership and Media Reforms

Media ownership in Sri Lanka is characterized by a dual structure comprising state and private entities, with an absence of public service broadcasting and community radio stations operating as genuine public service media. State-owned media institutions, established under specific legal frameworks, have historically functioned as propaganda tools for the ruling political

party, shifting allegiance with changes in government.

Privately-owned electronic media, on the other hand, operate primarily to serve the political and market interests of their owners. A notable feature of this sector is the involvement of politicians as owners or shareholders of media institutions, blending political influence with media control. Private media owners wield significant authority over content creation, news reporting, editing, and dissemination, leveraging the regulatory conditions of government-issued licenses. These licenses, often granted through political favoritism rather than competitive public tenders, confer substantial privileges on the licensees, making them de facto beneficiaries of government patronage.

The power held by private electronic media owners extends across political, economic, social, and cultural domains, reinforcing their ability to shape and manipulate public agendas and discourse. Consequently, privately owned media facilitate hegemony aimed at advancing the political agendas of their owners. Moreover, the ownership structures of these media entities are opaque. They are not listed on the stock market, and critical details regarding their board of directors, funding sources, profit-generating activities, and political affiliations remain concealed.

In this environment, both state and private media ownership structures present significant obstacles to media reform. Private media owners, in particular, actively resist reform efforts, perceiving them as threats to their political and economic agendas. They often leverage their media platforms as propaganda tools to undermine reform initiatives. When media reform proposals arise, these owners use their radio and television networks to frame such efforts as restrictions on media freedom, a tactic aimed at mobilizing public opinion against reform.

Furthermore, the dependence of governments, political parties, and public representatives on electronic media for their propaganda needs creates a mutual reliance. Media owners exploit this dependence to discourage any attempts at reform,

effectively using their influence as a bargaining tool.

This dynamic produces a paradoxical outcome: public representatives, influenced by the media's power and fearing negative coverage, often oppose media reform instead of advocating for it. They become complicit in maintaining the status quo, aligning with media owners to safeguard their political interests. This resistance is frequently framed under the guise of defending media freedom, a populist slogan that overshadows the broader need for systemic reform.

In conclusion, media ownership in Sri Lanka—marked by political entanglement, lack of transparency, and resistance to accountability—poses a significant barrier to meaningful media reform. The entrenched interests of media owners and their symbiotic relationship with political actors ensure that the media landscape remains resistant to change, perpetuating a cycle of influence that undermines public interest, democratic governance and public accountability.

Political Parties and Public Representatives in Media Reforms

During election seasons, political parties in Sri Lanka present policy manifestos outlining their commitments if elected to power. From the 1994 general election through 2015, the manifestos of major political parties prominently addressed media policies and media reforms. However, media policy discussions have been noticeably absent in more recent elections, such as those in 2019 and 2024.

The prominence of media policies in party manifestos has historically been influenced by the prevailing public agenda, often shaped by the efforts of the media and civil society. Political parties typically incorporate issues raised in public discourse into their manifestos, prompting further engagement by the public and civil society.

For instance, in the 1994, 2001, and 2015 elections, media freedom emerged as a significant public concern, leading political parties to propose specific policies addressing this issue. Over the period from 1994 to 2024, major political parties consistently included media-related policies in their manifestos, albeit with varying levels of emphasis and commitment.

A notable intervention in media policy formulation occurred during the 2015 and 2016 elections when the National Secretariat for Media Reform issued an open invitation to political parties to incorporate the UNESCO Media Development Indicators Report into their policy statements. This report was developed through consultations with key stakeholders in the media industry and represented one of the most structured civil society engagements in media policy advocacy. Consequently, several political parties integrated media reform proposals into their manifestos.

Earlier, during the 1993 and 1994 elections, organizations like the Free Media Movement and other civil society groups actively influenced political party policies. Similarly, during the 2024 elections, the Lawyers', Academia, Professionals and Civil Society Committee for System Change (LAPcS-Comm) presented recommendations to all political parties. These included proposals for establishing an independent electronic media commission and transforming state-owned media into genuinely independent public service entities.

Across elections from 1994 to 2024, three recurring media reform proposals can be identified in political party manifestos:

1. Establishing an Independent Electronic Media Regulatory Body

2. Transforming State-Owned Media to Public Service Media Institutions

3. Strengthening Freedom of Expression, and Media Accountability

Additionally, the legalization of the Right to Information Act appeared in party manifestos between 2001 and 2015, signaling a

significant step toward transparency and accountability.

While political parties have a responsibility to implement the policies outlined in their election manifestos, this commitment is often neglected after assuming power. The failure to fulfill these promises highlights a critical gap in accountability. Moreover, civil society and the public lack effective mechanisms to ensure that governments honor the policy commitments made during elections. The absence of structured follow-up or lobbying efforts further compounds this issue, leaving the implementation of critical media reforms unaddressed.

In essence, while media reform has historically been a recurring theme in political discourse during elections, sustained action and accountability remain elusive, underscoring the need for stronger civil society engagement and institutional mechanisms to uphold the social contract between citizens and political representatives.

Government and Media Reforms in Sri Lanka

Successive governments in Sri Lanka have made several attempts to implement media policy proposals outlined in their election manifestos. Media reform to ensure media freedom was a central theme in the 1993–1994 election campaigns. However, the implementation of these reforms has often been limited and inconsistent, highlighting significant challenges in aligning political promises with actionable policies.

The R.K.W. Gunasekara Committee and Its Aftermath

In 1993, the SLPP government appointed a committee led by lawyer R.K.W. Gunasekara to propose media reforms. This committee, through five sub-committees, studied various aspects of media governance and submitted comprehensive recommendations. Despite this effort, the government neither

enacted laws nor formulated policies to implement the recommendations. One reason for this inaction was the absorption of civil and political activists—who had initially advocated for media reforms—into government positions, where they prioritized maintaining the status quo to protect the government's popularity.

Among the committee's key recommendations was the proposal to transform state-owned media institutions into independent public service entities. While the New Education Service Radio Channel, operated under the government-owned Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, attempted to implement this initiative, the government ultimately halted the program, citing concerns that state media was misusing its freedom. This decision, supported by government officials and ministers, faced opposition from civil society.

Another notable recommendation was the establishment of an Independent Electronic Media Authority, introduced as an ACT in Parliament in 1997. Civil society organizations and opposition parties challenged the ACT in the Supreme Court, arguing that it posed a threat to media freedom. The court upheld these concerns and recommended revisions, but the government did not act on this advice. The lack of support for the ACT by civil society, media owners, and opposition parties—who viewed it as potentially restricting their interests—further undermined its progress.

The reluctance of civil society, journalists' Associations and media owners to engage constructively with the 1997 Electronic Media Authority ACT reflects a broader pattern of missed opportunities for media reform. Rather than proposing amendments or lobbying for a revised ACT, these groups prioritized short-term interests, ignoring the potential long-term benefits of an independent electronic media regulatory authority.

Furthermore, media reforms were a focal point during the 2001 general election. After assuming power, the new government prioritized implementing key legislative measures

outlined in its party manifesto. These included the enactment of the Parliamentary Privileges Act, the repeal of the Criminal Defamation Act, and the abolition of the Press Council Act. However, while the Press Council Act was not formally repealed, it was rendered inactive, and the other proposed reforms were successfully implemented.

Civil society showcased its influence during the 2015 elections by advocating for and prioritizing the enactment of the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Unlike in previous reform efforts, civil society activists maintained their independence from the government and exerted sustained pressure to ensure the RTI Act's passage. This successful enactment illustrates that committed political leadership and civil society advocacy can achieve meaningful media reforms when aligned with public interest.

The Role of International Organizations in Media Reform in Sri Lanka

International organizations have played a significant role in fostering media reform in Sri Lanka, primarily to promote and strengthen freedom of expression. These efforts encompass a range of activities, including capacity-building initiatives such as journalist training programs, the publication of observation reports, and advocacy for policy reforms. Much of this work is executed through local stakeholders of international organizations, often in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups.

Additionally, international journalists' organizations and Media Development agencies have contributed to the discourse through expert reports and observation missions, offering valuable insights and recommendations. One notable example is the comprehensive study titled Rebuilding Public Trust: Assessment of the Media Industry in Sri Lanka (2016), developed under the guidance of UNESCO's Media Development Indicators.

Conducted by the National Secretariat for Media Reforms and funded by International Media Support, this study provided a detailed analysis and actionable recommendations for media sector reforms. Despite these efforts, direct social interventions by international aid agencies in media reform remain infrequent.

However, a critical limitation of international organizations' interventions is their insufficient focus on fostering long-term self-sustainability. While funding and resources are often provided for specific projects, there is little emphasis on developing mechanisms or infrastructure that enable local stakeholders to sustain and expand these efforts independently over time. Addressing this gap is essential for creating durable and impactful media reforms in Sri Lanka.

Individual Interventions in Media Reform

Media reform in Sri Lanka presents significant challenges, primarily due to the inherent conflicts it generates with powerful media owners. This resistance is further compounded by the ignorance and complacency of key stakeholders within the media landscape, including government officials, civil society, academia, journalists' associations, politicians, and public representatives. Many of these stakeholders perceive the existing media structure as advantageous to their interests, contributing to their reluctance to support reforms. Consequently, individuals and organizations advocating for media reform often face opposition from these influential groups.

Despite these obstacles, certain individuals have made notable contributions to media reform in Sri Lanka, often working against entrenched interests. These interventions can be categorized into two distinct periods:

- 1990–2001: Victor Ivan, Sunanda Desapriya, Lushan Rajakaruna, Thilak Jayaratne

- 2010–2024: Wijananda Jayaweera, Dr. Pradeep N'

Weerasinghe, Dr. Ranga Kalansuriya, Nalaka Gunawardene, Dr.S. Raguram, Mangala Samaraweera.

These individuals have demonstrated that impactful interventions are possible, even in the face of considerable resistance. Their work highlights the critical role that dedicated reformists can play in promoting media freedom, editorial independence, transparency and accountability, setting a foundation for future efforts to reform Sri Lanka's media sector.

Media Reform Initiatives (2015–2020)

The period between 2015 and 2020 represents a significant phase of heightened effort, public engagement, and institutional focus on media reform in Sri Lanka. In 2016, the government initiated substantial measures by appointing the Wijayananda Jayaweera Committee to draft legislation aimed at safeguarding editorial independence in electronic media. This initiative was part of a broader set of recommendations put forth by the National Secretariat Media Reform. The committee subsequently developed the draft News Media Standards Act, which was subjected to a rigorous public and stakeholder consultation process conducted in nine provincials under the coordination of the National Secretariat Media Reform, a civil society organization. Feedback from these consultations was compiled and submitted to the government for consideration.

In response, the private-owned electronic media offered an alternative interpretation of the draft Act that diluted its original intent to guarantee editorial independence, ultimately halting its advancement. Thus, the progress of the draft Act was obstructed by a propaganda campaign orchestrated by a privately-owned electronic media firm, which alleged that the proposed legislation would curtail media freedom. This campaign mobilized a network of media activists and public representatives to amplify its opposition.

Although key organizations, including the Free Media

Movement, the Tamil Media Association, and the Muslim Media Association, participated in the Act's drafting process, they refrained from engaging in public discourse to advocate for its necessity. Their reluctance stemmed from fears of confronting the influential electronic media network that spearheaded the opposition. Additionally, media professionals, associations, and civil society groups advocating for enhanced media freedom appeared disinterested in promoting the proposed legislation, citing concerns over potential backlash from powerful media entities.

The opposition to the News Media Standard Act was largely influenced by the vested interests of certain electronic media owners, who perceived the Act as a threat to their ability to exploit media platforms for their own political agendas. This reflects a broader trend in Sri Lanka, where media institutions, journalists, civil society actors, and political parties often align with dominant electronic media firms for personal or institutional gains, rather than advancing media practices that serve the public interest.

In 2018, Mangala Samaraweera, as the newly appointed Minister of Mass Media, renewed efforts to strengthen freedom of expression in Sri Lanka. He established three specialized committees to draft state policies and legislative frameworks for media reform, focusing on:

1. Establishing an independent electronic media commission,

2. Transforming state-owned media into independent public service media, and

3. Creating a media education institution to elevate the professional standards of journalists.

The Independent Electronic Media Commission Act was drafted and submitted for cabinet approval and public consultation. However, the reform initiatives remained incomplete as the government's term ended before the recommendations could be fully implemented. In addition to these efforts, the National Secretariat for Media Reforms, with funding from the

MEND project, published three comprehensive study reports in 2019. These reports, developed through a multi-stakeholder consultation process, provided in-depth analyses and actionable recommendations for advancing media reform. The focus areas of the reports were:

1. Independent electronic media Commission,

2. Transforming state-owned media into independent public service media, and

3. News Media and Editorial Independence.

Despite the importance of these studies, their impact was limited due to the socio-economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis. Consequently, civil society organizations and the public were unable to prioritize or advocate for the proposed media reforms during this period.

Conclusion

The history of media reform efforts in Sri Lanka highlights a complex interplay between political interests, civil society advocacy, and media ownership. While civil society has proven its potential to drive reforms, as demonstrated by the RTI Act, its inconsistent engagement, coupled with the influence of powerful media owners, has often hindered broader reform initiatives.

Despite more than four decades of recognizing the need for new media policies, media laws, and media regulations to strengthen democracy and foster development in Sri Lanka, progress has been slow. Several factors contribute to this delay, including insufficient attention, ignorance, and a lack of commitment among key stakeholders within the media industry. These include government officials, media owners, civil society organizations, civic activists, journalists' associations, academia and political representatives, all of whom often view the existing media system as beneficial to their interests.

Facilitating the growth of independent and diverse media outlets is a crucial step in strengthening democratic engagement and fostering media pluralism. Achieving this requires comprehensive media reforms. Citizens, civil society, journalists' associations, and academia each hold a special responsibility in driving media reform. Promoting media literacy and cultivating a critical, informed citizenry are essential steps in this process. Equally crucial is the commitment of government and public representatives to media reform through a citizen-centered approach. Such an approach would ensure that media policies prioritize the public interest and support the democratic functions of the media.

Future efforts must overcome these challenges by fostering sustained public dialogue, promoting critical citizenship, empowering independent advocacy groups, and ensuring strong political commitment. These steps are essential to advancing media reforms that serve the public interest, strengthen democracy, and protect freedom of expression.

Furthermore, seeking judicial intervention to establish media laws and regulations must be considered as an additional avenue for advancing media reform. Judicial support can provide the necessary legal framework to ensure media freedom, editorial independence, accountability, media justice and public interest, especially when political or institutional barriers impede legislative progress. In sum, while the road to media reform in Sri Lanka has been slow and challenging, continued efforts from all sectors of society are essential for achieving meaningful progress.

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Community Radio as a Lifeline: Strengthening Communities through Health Awareness During COVID-19 in India

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Abstract

Community radio played an unprecedented role in disseminating credible health information and combating misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic in India. As a grassroots medium, it bridged the information gap and digital divide in rural and marginalised communities where mainstream media penetration is limited and selective. This study explores how community radio stations of India supported health awareness campaigns before the pandemic, delivering critical information about COVID-19 symptoms, preventive measures, health strategies, vaccination drives, and government protocols. By employing local languages and dialects with culturally influenced content, community radio stations fostered trust and ensured accessibility. They collaborated with healthcare professionals, grassroots organisations, and public authorities to deliver timely and accurate information, addressing mental health as well as pandemic-induced fear and misinformation. Moreover, these stations acted as platforms for community mobilisation with their engagement, enabling participatory communication that provided psychological support and feedback loops. The findings underscore the significance of community radio as an adaptable and resilient tool for public health communication, particularly in crises. This paper highlights its contributions pre- and during COVID-19 in India and outlines its potential for strengthening

health systems in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: *Community Radio in India, Health Awareness, COVID-19, Participatory Communication, Public Health Communication, Media Convergence.*

Introduction

Community radio is a form of non-commercial grassroots broadcasting that serves as a platform for community engagement, societal contribution, participatory communication and social development. It is designed to empower marginalised communities by providing a voice to the voiceless, enabling them to share local issues, cultural expressions, and concerns often ignored by traditional mainstream media. Community radio operates under inclusivity, participatory, sustainability, and non-profit orientation, usually relying on volunteer contributions and local funding. Unlike commercial or public radio, it focuses on hyper-local content. It operates with significant community involvement in programming and decision-making, thus fostering a sense of ownership and identity among listeners (Fraser & Estrada, 2002). The International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2010) underscores its role in advancing social cohesion and promoting local knowledge exchange, particularly in rural or underserved regions. Community radio is crucial in crisis communication, education, and advocacy, as seen in Asia, Africa, and Latin America initiatives.

Before delving into the role of community radio stations in health communication, let us briefly discuss the key concepts associated with it. Community communication is a multifaceted concept that involves a deep understanding of the crafted development message, the medium employed, and the target audience. It plays a significant role in bridging the communication gaps, fostering unity within communities by acting as a dignified bridge that strengthens bonds. Community journalism contributed by participation is instrumental in

shaping and reflecting a community's identity, serving as the voice of the voiceless and fostering a shared understanding of common values and responsibilities (Ibrahim, 2018). In the digital age, the rise of digital platforms as a primary medium for global information dissemination complements and alternatives to traditional community communication methods. Together, by convergence of community, digital and traditional forms of communication offer innovative ways of fostering connections that transcend geographical boundaries, demanding thorough academic exploration of their implications.

Let us also conceptualize the community's standing in the context of community communication. The concept of 'community' often carries a geographic connotation, comprising two main elements: a structured social gathering and a shared sense of belonging (Scott & Marshall, 2009). Modern interpretations, however, emphasise relationships beyond geographic, recognising communities based on shared characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or common interests, rather than solely on location. Benedict Anderson's idea of 'imagined communities' (Ellies, 2022) highlights the potential for shared identity in a politically theorised sense, further broadening the understanding of community dynamics. Scholars from the global South, like Dutta and Ray (2014), interpret 'community' as a union of 'commons' (people) and 'unity', signifying a collective built around shared causes or identities, whether physical or virtual, ethnic or cultural, linguistic or ritualistic. This broad perspective underpins the evolving nature of community in a prosumer's culture of a digitised world.

Community media, a broader concept integral to this discussion, is characterised by its empowerment of marginalised voices, local ownership, participatory nature, horizontal communication and commitment to non-commercial interests. Initially centred on geographic boundaries as pointed out in the above contexts, community media now address diverse interests and audiences, exemplifying their adaptability. According to UNESCO, community media are accountable

to their communities, fostering spaces for participation and minimising political or commercial interference. Dutta (2016) likened community media to a concept called DOLPHIN (direct, own, local, participatory, horizontal, intimate, not for profit)— social, cohesive, and communicative beings—emphasising characteristics like immediacy, intimacy, inclusivity, and non-profit motives. One illustrative model for community communication in developing regions is the 'C3' model (Dutta, 2014), designed to create sustainable communication hubs. C3 centres serve as platforms for information sharing, learning, and archiving, equipped with facilities like libraries, newspapers, radios, televisions, and internet connectivity. Unlike traditional models from developed regions, the C3 approach addresses the unique needs of underdeveloped or developing areas, promoting sustainability and community participation. Hence, community communication and media embody inclusivity, empowerment, and shared identity, which are crucial for fostering meaningful connections within and beyond traditional boundaries. These evolving concepts require ongoing scholarly research to fully appreciate their impact on contemporary social dynamics. Therefore, we can define community radio as "primarily a low power FM broadcasting service owned, controlled, managed and run by a particular community with a non-profit motive for providing and sharing information, education and entertainment which may lead to eradicate digital divide, address identity crisis, remove socio-economic hindrance, promote local culture and resolve local issues resulting in overall development of a community" (Dutta, 2019; Dutta & Ullah, 2019).

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to comprehensively examine the role and impact of community radio stations during the COVID pandemic in India. A survey of 46 community radio stations from 19 states provided

quantitative insights. At the same time, in-depth interviews with 10 key stakeholders and discourse analysis of the name of the health programmes offered qualitative perspectives. This dual approach enabled a robust analysis of operational dynamics, programming content, community engagement, and the impact of the community radio stations and their volunteers, who played a critical role like unsung heroes.

The quantitative section consisted of a structured survey targeting community radio stations from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, ensuring representation from urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. The survey questionnaire included closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather data on programming content, format of content, audience engagement strategies, sources of information, operational challenges, and collaborations with government and NGOS. The data were collected through online surveys, ensuring accessibility for participants across various locations of 19 Indian states. Statistical software was used to analyse the responses, generating descriptive statistics to identify trends and inferential statistics to uncover relationships between variables, such as programming content and audience engagement levels.

The qualitative research involved in-depth interviews with 10 stakeholders, including station managers, programme coordinators, listeners and representatives from collaborating government and non-governmental organisations. Purposive sampling ensured participants had substantial experience and expertise relevant to the study objectives. The semi-structured interview guide explored operational challenges, community impact, successful campaigns, and recommendations for enhancing effectiveness. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing or telephonic calls due to the physical restrictions imposed by the governments during the COVID period, and a couple of physical interviews were conducted post-COVID period, with durations ranging from 45 to 60 minutes. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the interview transcripts, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and key

insights. A discourse analysis method was used to analyse the names and contents of the health programmes broadcast by 46 community radio stations scattered in 19 states of India. These qualitative findings were triangulated with the survey data to provide a nuanced understanding of community radio's contributions during the most dangerous health crisis of the century.

Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent, and their identities were anonymised to ensure confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, with individuals free to withdraw at any stage without consequences. Participation was also received from about one-fourth of the stations targeted by the researchers. The methodology ensured that data collection adhered to ethical standards, promoting trust and reliability among participants.

Despite its strengths, the study faced certain limitations, such as potential biases in self-reported data, the broadcasters' paucity of time, and challenges in reaching remote radio stations. The findings provide valuable insights into the functioning and impact of community radio in India during the Pandemic, laying the groundwork for future research, which could include longitudinal studies to assess long-term outcomes. This comprehensive methodological framework underscores the critical role of community radio as a participatory medium for local development and communication for public health awareness and social behaviour change.

Discussion

Community radios in India

Community radio has emerged as a transformative tool for grassroots communication in India, promoting social development and community engagement, particularly in rural and underserved regions. Established the first community radio

in 2004, under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's community radio policy of 2002, it aims to empower local communities by providing them a platform to share their voices, address local issues, and celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity. Unlike public service and commercial broadcasting, community radios of India focus on hyper-local content, catering specifically to the needs and interests of the community they serve. This unique approach fosters inclusivity and enhances community participation, creating a sense of ownership among its listeners (Carpentier et al., 2003).

Community radio has proven to be particularly impactful in promoting education, health awareness, disaster preparedness and social cohesion. Many stations in India, such as GMR Radio in Andhra Pradesh, Sangham Radio in Telangana, Radio Brahmaputra in Assam and Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli in Tamil Nadu, focus on developmental programming that empowers women, educates farmers, develops skills and raises awareness about public health. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, community radio stations played a dynamic role in disseminating accurate and credible health information, combating misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, and promoting vaccination campaigns in local languages (Rajana et al., 2020). By addressing their communities' cultural and linguistic needs, these stations bridged the communication gap often left by mainstream media. For example, Radio Brahmaputra broadcasts programmes not only in Assamese and Hindi but also in Sadri for the tea-tribe community and in the languages of the Hajong and Deori communities for over a decade.

Moreover, community radio has demonstrated effectiveness in community development during disaster management and public health crises. During numerous natural disasters, many stations collaborated with non-governmental organisations to provide life-saving information and psychological support to affected communities through broadcasting and narrowcasting (Hasan & Adnan, 2024). Similarly, its role in spreading awareness about HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and sanitation practices in rural

India emphasises its capacity to drive social behavioural change and support government health initiatives such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan[1].

Despite its success, community radio in India faces challenges such as inadequate funding and advertising revenue, limited resources, regulatory constraints, social sustainability and technical difficulties. The stringent licensing process and restrictions on news broadcasting hinder the potential of many stations to serve their communities with the latest information fully. Nevertheless, initiatives by organisations such as the Community Radio Association of India, Community Radio Forum, Community Radio Federation and policy support from the government, like the Community Radio Facilitation Centre, have contributed to its gradual growth and sustainability to reach a total number of stations of over 500 in 2024.

Community radio has emerged as one of the most trusted media of communication for promoting health awareness and education in India in the last two decades (2004-2024), especially in rural and underserved regions. By leveraging its global idea with localised content and participatory nature, community radio stations have effectively disseminated health-related information in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways. Models like CLP (Community Learning Programme), designed by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in a collaborative process, were instrumental in mobilising the local communities to share their health issues, having taboos in many areas, on a broadcasting platform, which is considered the safest not to disclose their identities, but to receive health solutions. Unlike mainstream media outlets, community radio reaches marginalised populations with strategically developed content, addressing communities' specific health challenges and empowering individuals with knowledge to improve their well-being.

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1 *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* is a nationwide cleanliness campaign launched by the Government of India in 2014 to achieve a clean India and open defecation-free country.

One of the key features of community radio in promoting health is its ability to create collaborative and applicable programme designs. Stations often collaborate with healthcare professionals, local leaders, and community members to design content that addresses pressing health issues such as maternal health, child nutrition, sanitation, and infectious diseases. For instance, Gurgaon Ki Awaz of Haryana initiated maternal and child healthcare campaigns, especially designed using the CLP model for the migrant labourer, educating women on the importance of prenatal care, immunisation, sexual hygiene and breastfeeding practices. Similarly, Radio Bundelkhand in Madhya Pradesh has raised awareness about sanitation and hygiene through innovative storytelling and interviews with health experts.

Community Radio in Creating Awareness on COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, community radio stations in India initiated campaigns to combat fake news, misinformation, disinformation and malinformation and promote preventive measures. They broadcast programmes about symptoms, transmission, and safety protocols, often in regional languages and local dialects, ensuring accessibility and comprehension for rural audiences. Radio stations such as Alfaz-e-Mewat in Haryana provided live phone-in shows, allowing listeners to seek guidance directly from doctors and health workers. During the first phase of lockdown, a community radio show became a lifeline in the coverage area of the first community radio of northeastern India, Jnan Taranga. Forty-three-year-old Manoj Kumar Deka, an empanelled "Katha Bandhu", an anchor, single-handedly ran 333 hours of broadcasting in 37 days, supporting the mental and physical issues of the communities during their quarantine and confinement in the crisis, which was never experienced before. These initiatives not only disseminated factual information but also reduced fear and stigma associated with the disease (Dutta,

2020; Essel & Govender, 2023).

Findings

Community radio has also been a key player in health advocacy and social behaviour change communication. For example, it has supported government initiatives such as the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' by encouraging communities to adopt improved sanitation practices and improve the physical cleanliness of households. Radio stations have designed different programmes, jingles, etc., and conducted health camps and workshops in collaboration with NGOs and public health agencies, offering practical demonstrations and addressing myths related to diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS (Dutta & Ray, 2012).

Furthermore, the participatory nature of community radio promotes trust and commitment among listeners individually and through their listeners' clubs, as the programmes often feature local voices and culturally relevant content. This approach enhances the credibility of health messages and persuades communities to take proactive actions to improve their health and create a healthy community. Interactive formats, such as phone-ins, quizzes, dramas, and testimonials, further amplify the impact of these programmes, making them both informative and entertaining. The increasing recognition of community radio's role in public health, coupled with support from government policies and international/ inter-governmental organisations, local NGOs highlights the potential of community radio to drive sustainable health improvements in India.

Demographic profile of the community radio stations

The study's respondents included 46 community radio stations located across 19 states and union territories of India. These stations were distributed across regions- north, east, central,

west, south and north-east, reflecting a diverse geographical representation. Among the states, Uttar Pradesh had the highest number of participating radio stations, with seven respondents. Karnataka and Kerala followed this, each contributing five stations. Maharashtra accounted for four stations, while states like Orissa and Uttarakhand had three each. Several states, such as Gujarat, Haryana, Bihar, and Assam, were represented by two stations. In contrast, others had one station each, including Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, and West Bengal.

In terms of the location of these stations, a fairly balanced distribution between urban and rural areas was observed. Of the 46 radio stations, 21 were located in urban areas, while 25 were in rural regions. This urban-rural distribution highlights the inclusive nature of the survey, encompassing a broad spectrum of operational environments and community settings. The participation of rural stations is particularly significant, as these stations are often at the forefront of addressing localised challenges and fostering grassroots communication. This diverse sample enables a comprehensive analysis of community radio's role across varied socio-economic and cultural contexts in India.

As highlighted, the community radio's role is in addressing the needs of diverse communities, particularly those often underserved by mainstream media. The data shows that these stations prioritise inclusivity, focusing on various social groups, including women, children, youth, and marginalised populations. All 46 stations surveyed cater to women, children, and students, emphasising their commitment to education, empowerment, and children's welfare. Through educational programmes, community radio provides vital information and support to enhance the well-being of these groups. Similarly, 45 stations focus on youth, addressing topics such as career guidance, mental health, and entertainment, while also catering to the visually impaired, making content accessible to individuals with disabilities.

In terms of audience reach, community radio demonstrates

its widespread impact. About 4.3% of the stations boast audiences exceeding one million, while 21.7% cater to audiences between 500,000 and one million, reflecting their significant outreach in densely populated areas. Nearly half of the stations (47.8%) serve audiences ranging from 100,000 to 500,000, indicating a substantial reach in regional and local contexts. Smaller stations also play a critical role, with 15.2% reaching between 50,000 and 100,000 listeners and 8.7% serving 10,000 to 50,000 people. Only a small percentage (2.2%) caters to audiences below 10,000, showcasing the impact of community radio even in remote and niche areas.

Languages of Broadcast and Narrowcast

The community radio stations surveyed broadcast their programmes in a rich diversity of languages, reflecting India's multilingual and multicultural fabric. 31 languages and dialects were reported, demonstrating the stations' commitment to catering to their local and regional audiences in their native tongues.

Among the languages, Hindi emerged as the most commonly used, with 18 broadcasting stations. This reflects its widespread understanding and prominence across many states in India. English, used by 9 stations, also held a significant position, likely serving audiences in urban or mixed-language contexts. Regional languages featured prominently, showcasing stations' efforts to engage their specific communities. Bhojpuri and Kannada were used by 5 stations each, while Malayalam and Marathi were each broadcast by 4 stations. Languages like Bengali, Tamil, and Odia were used by 3 stations each, and Bundeli, a regional language, was also broadcast by 3 stations.

Several languages were represented by one or two stations, highlighting the focus on smaller linguistic communities. For instance, Assamese, Gujarati, Telugu, and Konkani were used by 2 stations each, while languages such as Haryanvi, Adivasi,

Rajasthani, and Garwali had a presence at a single station each. Lesser-known and tribal languages like Paniya, Beary, Deoriand Hajong were also included, underlining the commitment to linguistic inclusivity. Including indigenous and tribal languages, such as Santali, Sadri, and Adivasi, underscores the stations' dedication to empowering marginalised groups. The survey indicates that community radio stations in India are bridging communication gaps and preserving and promoting regional and tribal dialects through their programming. This linguistic diversity is a testament to community radio's role in catering to India's pluralistic society.

Media convergence strategies

As the terrestrial broadcasting reach of the community radio stations in India is very limited, with 50 Watts transmission that covers a 10-15 km radius, the community radio stations have adopted various media convergence strategies to expand their reach, enhance engagement, and diversify content delivery platforms. These convergence efforts illustrate the stations' adaptability and commitment to utilizing modern communication tools to serve their communities effectively.

Messaging applications like WhatsApp emerge as the most commonly used platform, with 46 stations leveraging it for real-time communication, audience interaction, and content distribution. Its popularity is likely due to its accessibility, ease of use, and widespread adoption across urban and rural areas. Websites are utilised by 41 stations, indicating a strong online presence to share station updates, broadcast schedules, and additional resources. Similarly, Facebook, which 37 stations use, highlights the importance of social media in connecting with diverse audiences and creating a platform for discussions and feedback. YouTube, employed by 35 stations, is another significant tool for sharing content, enabling stations to archive programs and reach consumers of visual content.

Live streaming, adopted by 26 stations, reflects the stations' efforts to cater to tech-savvy audiences and expand their geographic reach beyond traditional radio signals. This capability allows listeners from anywhere in the world to access the programmes, enhancing inclusivity. Other platforms like Instagram (10 stations), Mobile Apps (10 stations), and LinkedIn (4 stations) highlight additional avenues of convergence. Instagram is likely used for visually engaging content, mobile apps for easy programme access and tuning to the station, and LinkedIn for professional networking and collaborations. Lastly, X (formerly Twitter), used by 14 stations, emphasises the importance of staying current with real-time updates and engaging in larger social and policy conversations.

The adoption of these diverse platforms demonstrates how community radio stations are integrating traditional and digital media to meet the changing needs of their audiences. This convergence amplifies their outreach and strengthens their role as an inclusive and versatile communication medium. Community radio stations in India have played a critical role in addressing public health concerns, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. An analysis of their activities highlights their proactive engagement in health programming, their methodologies for creating impactful content, and the challenges they addressed during this unprecedented crisis.

Health Programming

Before COVID-19, almost all (97.8%) community radio stations were already engaged in health-related programming, indicating a strong pre-existing focus on public health issues. The duration of these programmes varied, with most (42.2%) lasting between 15 to 30 minutes, followed by 30 minutes to 1 hour (31.1%). These programmes utilised diverse formats, including interview-based segments, phone-in programmes, radio magazines, and features, which ensured varied and engaging content delivery.

Discourse Analysis of the names of Health programmes

The names of health programmes broadcast on community radios in India reflect a strategic and cultural blend of language, themes, and social connections. These names showcase linguistic diversity, incorporating Hindi, English, and regional languages to resonate with varied audiences. For instance, titles like 'Suno Meri Behna' (Listen, My Sister) and 'Lamhe Sehat Bhare' (Moments Filled with Health) incorporate Hindi phrases that create a familiar and comforting tone for Hindi-speaking populations. Similarly, regional titles such as 'Apunar Swatchya Amar Katha' (Our Health, Our Story in Assamese) and 'Aama Swasthya' (Our Health in Odia) emphasise inclusivity and cultural sensitivity by addressing specific linguistic communities.

The overarching themes of health awareness, disease prevention, wellness, and empowerment are prominent across these programme names. Words like 'Sehat' (Health) and 'Arogya' (Wellness) appear repeatedly in titles such as 'Sehat Ke Baat Doctor Ke Saath' (Talk about Health with the Doctor) and 'Arogya Darshyan' (Wellness Vision), reflecting the programmes' focus on promoting health literacy and holistic well-being. Using such terms aligns with India's traditional cultural perspectives, where wellness is considered a form of wealth essential to a fulfilling life. Several programmes adopt a conversational and advisory tone, particularly targeting women and families—titles like 'Dr. Didi Ki Salah' (Advice from Doctor Sister) and 'Suno Meri Behna' (Listen, My Sister), 'Chahat Chaowk' (Desired Square) address women directly, acknowledging their pivotal role in family health management, menstruation, sexual hygiene, etc. Programmes such as 'Sahaj Swasth' (Easy Health) and 'Aap Ka Swasth Aap Ke Hath' (Your Health in Your Hands) emphasise individual empowerment, encouraging listeners to take charge of their health.

The titles also reflect contemporary public health challenges and awareness campaigns. Programmes like 'Dengue Prevention

and Basic Hygiene', 'Measles Rubella', and 'Mission COVID-19' specifically address important health issues, combining direct messaging with educational content. Titles like 'Health @ 904' and 'Mission Corona' use innovative and modern language to appeal to a younger audience while maintaining their focus on critical health themes. Interestingly, some titles are deeply rooted in traditional Indian philosophies, blending heritage with modern health education. Examples include 'Vaidya devo bhava' (The Doctor is Divine) and 'Shariram Adyam' (The Body is Primary), which evoke ancient beliefs about the sacredness of health and wellness. In contrast, titles like 'Healthy Lifestyle' and 'Meet Your Doctor' adopt straightforward, modern naming conventions that make the content accessible to all.

Emotional and relational appeals are also evident in programme names. Titles such as 'Lamhe Sehat Bhare' (Moments Filled with Health) and 'Baatein Sehat Ki' (Conversations About Health) evoke warmth and intimacy. In contrast, collective expressions like 'Humara Swasthya' (Our Health) and 'Aama Swasthya' (Our Health) emphasise shared responsibility within communities. These names aim to foster a sense of trust and connection among listeners.

Lastly, some programmes employ playful and creative naming to draw attention. For example, 'Tan-Tan-Tandurusti' (Sound Mind, Sound Body) uses rhythmic expressions, while 'Swant Sukhay', 'Bhulshastra Samaj Gairsamaj', and 'Aarogya Sakhi' combine humour and layered meanings to spark curiosity. Such titles highlight the importance of engaging the audience through innovative communication strategies. The names of community radio health programmes in India are thoughtfully crafted to reflect linguistic diversity, cultural values, and health priorities. By combining emotional, traditional, and modern elements, these programmes effectively engage diverse audiences and foster a collective understanding of health and wellness issues.

Formats of Programmes before and during the Pandemic

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the formats of health programmes on community radio stations reflected a diverse and multifaceted approach to engage their audiences. The predominant format was interview-based programmes, utilised by 80% of stations. This format allowed direct interaction with experts, such as doctors and health professionals, offering reliable information and personalised insights on various health topics. It also facilitated a structured yet conversational tone, making complex medical information accessible to a broad audience. Phone-in programmes- one of the most used formats of health programming, used by 42.2% of stations, provided a platform for real-time interaction between listeners and subject matter experts. This format enhanced community participation, enabling listeners to ask questions and share their health concerns directly. In the programme 'Chahat Chowk' broadcast by 'Gurgaon Ki Awaz', using the Community Learning Programme (CLP), received a huge number of phone calls, especially from the migrant women labourers on menstrual and sexual hygiene, specifically a lot of calls on the problem of white discharge. Similarly, radio magazines (44.4%) added variety to the content by combining features such as interviews, skits, and expert opinions in a dynamic and engaging format. This approach catered to audiences seeking both information and entertainment.

The use of radio features or documentaries (24.2%) reflected a more in-depth storytelling approach. These programmes often explored specific health topics, providing detailed narratives supported by research, case studies, or historical perspectives. This format appealed to listeners interested in comprehensive coverage of issues. Finally, regular presentations by radio announcers or anchors (57.8%) played a significant role in delivering straightforward health messages in their announcements. This format relied on clarity and consistency, making it an effective tool for disseminating

essential health information to a broad audience. The diverse use of these formats before COVID-19 highlights the adaptability and creativity of community radio stations in addressing public health issues in engaging and inclusive ways.

Similar to the health programmes broadcast by the stations before the pandemic, the formats used for community radio programmes on COVID-19 during the pandemic reflect a strategic diversification to maximise community engagement and impact during a critical public health crisis. The data indicates a combination of interactive, creative, and informative approaches that effectively address varied audience preferences and needs. The most widely used format is the interview-based programme (91.30%), highlighting the importance of expert-driven content. This format provided a platform for doctors, health officials, district administrators and other specialists to directly address public concerns, offering reliable information and clarifying doubts. The high prevalence of phone-in programmes (78.30%) further underscores the emphasis on audience participation. These programmes fostered trust, community involvement, and a sense of empowerment during uncertain times by allowing listeners to ask questions in real time.

Songs and jingles (73.90%) emerged as an engaging and culturally resonant format. These effectively reinforced key messages like mask-wearing, handwashing, and social distancing, particularly among rural or less literate audiences. The use of regular presentations by radio announcers (69.60%) ensured consistency and clarity in disseminating essential updates and guidelines, complementing other dynamic formats. Radio magazines (50%) offered a multi-faceted approach, combining interviews, skits, and expert opinions to deliver comprehensive and engaging content. Similarly, live programmes (45.70%) from the field provided immediacy and authenticity, fostering a deeper connection with listeners. Meanwhile, drama and voxpopuli (39.10%) added a creative narrative element, making health messages relatable and memorable through storytelling and the voices of ordinary community members.

Less frequently used formats included competitions (19.60%) and social media messages (15.20%), which supplemented traditional radio broadcasts. Competitions likely incentivised learning and engagement on the new normal, while social media extended the reach of programmes to a broader, tech-savvy audience.

During the pandemic and also post-pandemic, health became the most important segment for all community radio stations. The data reveals a comprehensive strategy for COVID-19 programming, combining expert-led formats with participatory and creative elements. This multi-format approach allowed community radio stations to effectively inform, educate, and engage their audiences during a critical public health crisis.

Sources of Information on COVID-19

The sources of information used for producing health programmes on COVID-19 by community radio stations reflect a diverse and collaborative approach, ensuring the content's accuracy, relevance, and credibility. The integration of global, official, local, and community-based data sources demonstrates the multifaceted nature of the production process. The websites of the health ministries and the National Health Mission[2] The Government of India, along with the state governments, was the most relied upon source (87%), providing authoritative and up-to-date information on COVID-19 protocols, guidelines, and statistics. This ensures that the health programmes are aligned with official public health directives. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) (69.60%) served as a critical global source, offering reliable information on COVID-19 trends, precautions, and vaccination campaigns.

Local sources also played a vital role in ensuring the

2 The National Health Mission (NHM) is a flagship programme by the Government of India aimed at strengthening healthcare infrastructure and providing accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare, especially to the vulnerable populations.

content remained community-specific and relatable. Local doctors (84.80%) and local hospitals (67.40%) were key contributors, providing expert insights and real-time updates on the pandemic's impact in their areas. ASHA[3] workers (58.70%) and Panchayat members (32.60%) offered grassroots-level information, reflecting the on-ground realities of rural and semi-urban communities. These partnerships ensured that the programmes addressed the specific needs of the local population.

Collaboration with other stakeholders (50%) further enhanced the richness of the content. By engaging with organisations like the National Health Mission (NHM) (37%) and Indian/ state Medical Associations (23.90%), the stations were able to incorporate professional expertise and additional resources into their programming. Insights from journalists from ground zero (32.60%) and COVID-19 patients (39.10%) provided a different perspective, humanising the pandemic's impact and fostering empathy within the community.

Digital platforms are also prominent sources of information. Social media (47.80%) and messaging apps like WhatsApp (26.10%) facilitated rapidly disseminating updates and community feedback. These platforms enabled the stations to stay connected with their audiences and adapt to emerging trends and concerns. International organisations such as UNICEF (21.70%) contributed to the broader educational and child-focused aspects of COVID-19 programming. Community-based inputs, including those from community radio associations (19.60%) and students/ frontline warriors (15.20%), highlighted the participatory nature of the production process. While Anganwadi centres (20%) provided critical insights on vulnerable populations like children and women, the District Information and Public Relations Office (DIPRO) (2.20%) played a minor but valuable role in official communication.

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3 ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) is a community health worker initiative under NHM, promoting healthcare access in rural areas of India

The use of newspapers (63%) and radio/television (41.30%) demonstrates a reliance on traditional media for verified news and updates, supplementing digital and grassroots sources. Interestingly, input from people from foreign countries (8.70%) indicates a global perspective, enriching the programmes with comparative insights. The diverse range of sources underscores the collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to creating health programmes. By combining official data, local expertise, community feedback, and digital resources, these programmes ensured both accuracy and relevance, effectively addressing the informational needs of their listeners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collaborative strategies adopted by the Community Radios

The data highlights a robust collaboration between community radio stations and various health and civil society organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting a well-coordinated approach to addressing public health challenges. The highest level of collaboration is observed with local doctors (76.10%) and local government hospitals (63%), emphasising the reliance on grassroots medical professionals and institutions for accurate and timely information. This collaboration ensures the content remains locally relevant and addresses the community's healthcare needs. Similarly, the involvement of the District Health Department (67.40%) reinforces the alignment of community radio programmes with regional public health strategies and administrative directives.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (47.80%) and volunteers (50%) also played a significant role, reflecting the importance of civil society and individual contributions in pandemic response efforts. NGOS likely contributed specialised expertise, resources, and outreach capabilities, while volunteers added a layer of grassroots engagement, helping to disseminate health messages effectively. Collaboration with the National

Health Mission (NHM) (37%) and District/Sub-divisional Administration (34.80%) indicates a linkage with larger government frameworks. These partnerships likely provided strategic guidance and ensured the programmes were consistent with national and district-level policies and guidelines.

Self-Help Groups (30.40%) were also involved, including community-driven initiatives. These groups often act as trusted networks within their communities, helping to amplify health messages and support behavioural change at the household level. Interestingly, there is no instance of a lack of collaboration (0%), highlighting that all community radio stations have established partnerships during the pandemic. This enumerates the collective effort to pool resources, expertise, and outreach mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of health communication during the crisis.

These collaborations ensured the credibility of the information disseminated and allowed stations to provide timely updates. Many of the stations also used publications like COVID-Katha.[4], which was published by Dr Anamika Ray Memorial Trust and the NCSTC, DST, Govt. of India. The data reveals that a significant majority (75%) of respondents have consulted with the COVID-Katha publication to verify the credibility of information used in their health programmes. This indicates a strong commitment to ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the content, which is crucial for maintaining public trust, especially during health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, 13% of respondents reported not consulting with COVID-Katha, highlighting a potential vulnerability in their information dissemination process. Additionally, 12% indicated that they were unaware of the publication. Stations were active in campaigns against fake news, with 55% following initiatives like #CheckTheFake, the only month-long campaign on fake

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4 COVID Katha is available in different languages at the website of Dr Anamika Ray Memorial Trust www.armt.in and the website of the DST, Govt. of India.

information during the pandemic, run by Dr Anamika Ray Memorial Trust. Additionally, 75% reported having mechanisms to fact-check information before broadcasting, reducing the spread of misinformation in their communities.

Community Engagement and Public Perception of COVID-19

Stations maintained high levels of community engagement during the pandemic. Methods included connecting with community members via phone and social media, visiting communities, and allowing limited studio visits. These efforts ensured that programming remained participatory and reflective of community needs. Through constant communication, stations identified various community perceptions about COVID-19. While many understood the importance of precautions like masks and hygiene, others held misconceptions, such as believing the virus was a conspiracy or could be cured with indigenous remedies. Stations worked to dispel these myths through targeted programming. Listeners responded most to programmes addressing physical and mental health queries, myths about COVID-19, preventive measures, and nutrition guidelines. Topics like stigma against COVID-19 patients, lockdown guidelines, and self-medication also garnered significant feedback. Educational content, including online learning, work-from-home strategies, and yoga, highlighted the stations' adaptability in addressing emerging needs.

Designing Health Programmes by Community Radio Stations in India

Designing health programmes by community radio stations in India demonstrates a participatory, systematic, and community-centric approach. Based on the data provided, this qualitative analysis highlights key elements of the process,

emphasising the integration of local needs, expert validation, diverse formats, and strategic dissemination.

Participatory and Needs-Based Content Development

Community radio stations prioritise the needs of their communities when selecting topics and designing programmes. The content is often derived from real-world issues the community faces, such as health crises or disease outbreaks, as seen in the focus on COVID-19 and containment zones. Data is collected through conversations with villagers, social media interactions, and phone calls, ensuring that programmes are grounded in the lived realities of the community. Community participation plays a significant role in shaping the content. For example, listeners' input via phone-in programmes and community members' questions help identify pressing health concerns, ensuring that the programming remains relevant and impactful. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership among communities and listeners and builds trust in the messaging.

Validation and Expert Collaboration

A noteworthy aspect of programme design is the rigorous process of content validation. Before broadcasting, stations consult with the local administrations, health departments, or subject experts to ensure accuracy and appropriateness. Validation by medical professionals, such as doctors and public health specialists, further enhances credibility. For instance, content on COVID-19 is aligned with guidelines from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) and validated by experts from institutions like Narayana Health. This meticulous validation process ensures that programmes maintain high reliability standards, which is critical when addressing sensitive health issues.

Innovative Formats and Diverse Content Delivery

Community radio stations employ a range of creative formats to engage their audiences as discussed earlier. These include interviews and discussions featuring resource persons, doctors, and health experts; these formats provide authoritative insights and allow for real-time issue resolution. Dramas and skits effectively simplify complex health concepts and make them relatable to listeners. A magazine format often combines short skits with expert-led Q&A sessions; songs and tips formats are particularly appealing to rural audiences, leveraging local dialects and cultural elements to convey health messages; promos and awareness were short and impactful announcements broadcasted regularly to reinforce key messages; interactive segments such as phone-in programmes and vox-pops provide a platform for listeners to ask questions, share concerns, and seek advice. By combining entertainment with education and information- edutainment and entertainment, community radio stations ensure that health programmes are informative but also engaging and memorable.

Multi-Channel Dissemination

As discussed during the quantitative analysis, the health programmes are disseminated through a convergence of traditional and modern platforms, expanding their reach and accessibility. Regular live and pre-recorded features are the backbone of dissemination, including interviews, discussions, and dramas. Messaging applications are used for announcements, sharing health tips, and gathering feedback. Traditional media such as newspapers and digital forms such as social media platforms complement radio broadcasts, amplifying the reach of health messages and engaging tech-savvy listeners. Including outdoor events, such as street plays, wall paintings, murals and graffiti, mask campaigns and ground events, further enhances community engagement and tangibly reinforces radio messages.

Integration of Local Culture and Language

A significant strength of community radio health programmes is their emphasis on local dialects and culturally resonant message design. Jingles, songs, and skits often incorporate regional languages, fostering an emotional connection with listeners and enhancing comprehension. This approach ensures inclusivity and bridges communication gaps that might arise from linguistic or cultural diversity.

Structured and Systematic Production Process

The health design process is systematic, beginning with collecting reliable information and researching the chosen topic. Scripts and interview questions are carefully prepared to meet audience needs and expert advice. Integrating a programme management committee highlights the collaborative nature of content development, involving multiple stakeholders in decision-making. The design of health programmes by community radio stations in India exemplifies a community-centric approach that balances educational objectives with cultural resonance and entertainment. These programmes effectively address local health needs by integrating community input, expert validation, innovative formats, and diverse dissemination channels while fostering trust and engagement. This model of participatory content creation offers valuable lessons for leveraging media as a tool for public health communication.

Impact of Health Programmes

The impact of health programmes was significant, with 46.7% of stations reporting high impact and 24.4% reporting extreme impact. No station reported zero impact, underscoring the effectiveness of their health communication efforts. Feedback mechanisms were robust, with 45.7% of feedback being appreciated and 41.3% highly appreciated, showcasing strong

community trust and engagement.

Community radio stations have demonstrated a profound impact on health communication and social behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. These programmes have increased awareness, fostered trust, and addressed community-specific needs. By leveraging their localised and participatory approach, community radios have effectively influenced public health outcomes and strengthened community resilience. One of the most evident impacts of these health programmes was the increase in public awareness about COVID-19, its transmission, and the necessary preventive measures. Campaigns focusing on the new normal, such as mask-wearing, hand hygiene, and physical distancing, were particularly successful, with many listeners adopting these practices. For instance, targeted mask campaigns significantly increased mask usage among community members. This increased awareness contributed to a noted decline in COVID-19 cases in certain areas, highlighting the effectiveness of these outreach efforts. Additionally, the timely delivery of accurate information helped reduce community panic and misinformation.

The programmes also played a critical role in building trust and dispelling myths and superstitions surrounding the virus. Community radios became reliable sources of information, addressing queries, clarifying doubts, and removing the stigma associated with COVID-19. Listeners reported relying on these programmes for guidance, especially during the lockdown. The involvement of public health officers and district administrators in broadcasts further enhanced credibility, while the inclusion of listeners' voices fostered a sense of trust and participation. These efforts educated the community and strengthened relationships between citizens and health authorities. Community engagement was another standout feature of the programmes. Listeners actively participated by sharing feedback, asking questions, and proposing new topics for discussion. This participatory element ensured the content remained relevant to the audience's needs. Calls from listeners highlighted their reliance on community

radio as a key source of information, with many following the guidelines and instructions provided through broadcasts. The programmes also supported local health services by encouraging cooperation with health workers such as ASHA and Aarogya Sevak[5], further enhancing their effectiveness.

The stations' efforts extended beyond health messaging to include mental health and livelihoods. Sessions on mental health were described as 'very successful', providing listeners with strategies to cope with anxiety and stress during the pandemic. These sessions contributed to overall mental resilience, complementing the physical health-focused content. Additionally, livelihood-related programming helped communities navigate the economic challenges posed by the pandemic, broadening the impact of the broadcasts. Another significant factor in the success of these programmes was their personalised content. Delivered in local dialects and validated by health experts, the messages resonated deeply with listeners. Community radio stations addressed specific myths and concerns with culturally sensitive and accessible language, ensuring the information reached even the most vulnerable populations. This localised approach ensured relatability and boosted the programmes' effectiveness.

Conclusion

Community radio stations demonstrated their value as grassroots communication platforms during the pandemic. By leveraging diverse formats, credible sources, and robust feedback mechanisms, they effectively addressed health concerns, countered misinformation, and maintained strong community engagement. Their efforts provided essential health information and fostered resilience and trust within the communities they served. Addressing critical issues through localised, participatory content has become a voice for the voiceless, empowering

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5 Aarogya Sevak is a healthcare volunteer initiative focused on delivering basic health services and raising awareness at the community level.

marginalised communities and driving social transformation. Further policy reforms and investment are essential to maximise its impact and expand its reach nationwide.

Community radios in India have become an indispensable medium for promoting public health and strengthening grassroots resilience. They effectively bridge information gaps and foster community development by addressing the unique needs of diverse groups. Their focus on women, children, youth, farmers, and marginalised communities reflects a strong commitment to inclusivity and empowerment. With varying audience sizes, these stations reach a broad spectrum of listeners, ranging from large urban audiences to small, rural populations, demonstrating their versatility and impact as a grassroots communication medium. This analysis highlights the essential role of community radio in strengthening local communities.

The data in this study highlights a multi-stakeholder approach where local, regional, and national entities collaborate with community radio stations. This synergy between healthcare professionals, institutions, civil society, and volunteers has ensured that health programmes during the pandemic are credible, impactful, and widely disseminated. Broadcasting health concerns, these stations influenced social and behavioural change, reduced stigma, and strengthened public health outcomes. Their impact demonstrates the power of community-driven media in addressing global crises at the grassroots level.

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The Role of Group Communication in Establishing the Concept of God in Sri Lankan Society (With special reference to Dedimnda Deviyo in Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya in Kegalle District)

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Abstract

The origin of the concept of God in human beliefs and faith can be traced back to the earliest days of man. Human life can be manipulated and controlled by an invisible force, and that belief was evident in every society of the time. Through specific communication strategies, this strong feeling has been firmly established over millions of years and has been continuously reinforced from generation to generation. To understand why an invisible force has such a strong influence on human thoughts and what the effect of communication is, it is necessary to study the causes. Further information was obtained using the observation method. The collected data were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative and qualitative techniques. Accordingly, this study examined the effect of group communication on establishing the concept of God in Sri Lankan society. The research problem to be studied is how group communication affects establishing the concept of God in Sri Lankan society. It has been specifically investigated for the Dedimunda Deviyo in Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya in Kegalle District. Data required for the study was obtained through the survey method. The sample was randomly selected and limited to two hundred. Data was collected from them

through questionnaires and interviews. In addition, further data were collected from the chief priest in charge of the Thewa of the Deewalaya through the interview method. Also, the required data was collected using the observation method. The collected data were analyzed using a mixed method, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. It was concluded through this research that group communication has traditionally played a strong role in establishing the concept of God Dedimunda in society.

Keywords: *Dedimunda Deviyo, Beliefs and faith, Group communication, Sri Lankan society*

Introduction

According to Rothwell (2021), "a speech, discussion, or lecture in which one person addresses a group is called group communication" (p. 45). Communication involving more participants than interpersonal communication is called group communication, with participation examples including discussions and conferences. "The size of the group can vary, with a minimum of three members, and it can be divided into small groups (3-25 members) and large groups (more than 25 members)" (Rothwell, 2021, p. 47). Considering the definitions of group communication, a general concept emerges that encompasses several key characteristics. Group communication involves any collection of people in physical contact or proximity, forming a group based on shared characteristics, such as goals or interests. It is characterized by organized interactions that occur in repeated patterns, signifying structured communication processes. Additionally, the group members share a sense of equal consciousness in their membership and interaction, creating a cohesive environment where communication flows with mutual understanding and participation. This collective identity and consistent interaction define the essence of group communication (Rajapaksha, 1998).

Since humans cannot fulfill their basic needs independently, they have worked in groups since ancient times. In these early stages, there was little need to differentiate between individual needs, as most people's requirements were similar. However, as humans evolved from primitive beings to more civilized societies, significant transformations occurred. The development of kinship relations between families and other social activities likely paved the way for various social customs (Smith, 2018). When considering how the concept of God entered human belief systems, it becomes evident that this idea traces back to the earliest stages of human history. While it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the sacrificial practices of that time, the belief in an invisible force capable of influencing human life must have originated from the moment humans recognized such a force (Jones, 2020). The idea that happiness is a divine gift and that hardships result from divine wrath became ingrained over time. This strong sense of religious and cultural belief persists in the modern world despite the passage of millennia. Without the power of communication between individuals, humans would not have developed such profound faith in these mysterious and unseen forces (Brown & Davis, 2019).

If this is related to their religion, it can be seen how people are disciplined even harshly. Daya Amarasekara (1988) thinks that religion can be identified as an element linked with human activities since the beginning of culture. Anthropologists argue that "religion" originates from the Latin word religare, meaning to celebrate, care for, and preserve (Smith, 2017). Across different cultures, people have developed specific beliefs and practices based on their religious sentiments, which guide their actions and behaviours. When viewed collectively, these beliefs and practices indicate that religion is a broad social convention that transcends cultural boundaries. Religion is a shared agreement within societies to express and maintain societal values and attitudes. This function is standard across all societies, emphasizing the universal role of religion in shaping social norms. Furthermore, religion is recognized as one of the most significant social

institutions, crucial in societal cohesion. Functionalist social anthropologists, such as Durkheim, have posited that religion originates from society and operates as a self-sustaining social logic that reinforces the collective conscience (Durkheim, 1912/2001). This perspective highlights the integrative function of religion in maintaining social order and stability.

In developing religious faith, individuals have been motivated to create and worship various symbols and signs based on their beliefs. These symbols represent invisible forces that humans rely on for emotional well-being, giving these forces a religious dimension and leading to the practice of offering sacrifices. Consequently, people turned to these unseen forces for answers to emotional and psychological traumas without hesitation. As part of this belief system, numerous practices emerged that sought help from deities and demons, to appease them. Over time, ritualistic elements such as sacrifices, chanting, mantras, and gurukam (spiritual healing) became integrated into the everyday lives of ordinary people (Smith, 2018). The belief in deities was localized, with specific gods and spirits constructed in various regions. Offerings were made to these deities with the belief that engaging with them would be easier and more personal. The construction of local gods also strengthened individuals' sense of belonging within their communities, as the localized deities served as tangible symbols of faith and cultural identity (Jones, 2020).

Communities have historically maintained traditions of worshipping deities associated with their regions or gods unique to their cultural or familial groups. Regardless of the specific deity being revered, these gods are typically seen as omnipotent forces, exerting influence over all aspects of physical and spiritual life. Kinship plays a pivotal role in shaping these religious practices, as the belief in the deity is not an individual phenomenon, but one that is collectively developed and sustained through relationships within the community. Kinship ties are particularly influential in transmitting and preserving these beliefs across generations. This indicates that religious faith and the concept of a deity are not

solitary constructs but are shaped through communal interactions and shared traditions. This research aims to explore the influence of group communication on the perpetuation and reinforcement of religious beliefs, focusing on the worship of God Dedimunda at the Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya. By examining the role of kinship and other social factors in shaping the collective religious experience, this study provides empirical insights into how group communication contributes to affirming the concept of God within these communities.

Literature review

Group communication has long been a vital aspect of human social interaction, especially in establishing and perpetuating religious beliefs. In the context of Sri Lankan society, the concept of God and local deities, such as Dedimunda Deviyo, have been deeply entrenched within cultural practices, often reinforced through communal worship, rituals, and collective experiences. This literature review explores existing research on the role of group communication in establishing the concept of God, with special reference to the worship of Dedimunda Deviyo at Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya in Kegalle District.

Researchers have examined group communication from various theoretical angles, such as phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and functionalist theory. Emile Durkheim (1912/2001) emphasized communal rituals' role in forming religious ideas, contending that shared experiences and collective consciousness are the sources of religion. Durkheim argues that the connection within the community produces a sense of oneness that is subsequently projected onto the divine, resulting in a shared conception of God or deities. This is demonstrated in Sri Lanka by how nearby communities unite to worship the deity Dedimunda Deviyo, which is linked to healing and protection.

Building on this, Berger and Luckmann (1967) proposed the social construction of reality, which emphasizes that religious

beliefs and symbols are maintained through social interactions. In the case of Sri Lankan religious practices, group communication serves as a mechanism for transmitting beliefs about Dedimunda Deviyo across generations, reinforcing the deity's role in both spiritual and material aspects of life.

Kinship and Communal Belief Systems

Kinship ties play a crucial role in perpetuating religious beliefs in Sri Lankan society. Studies by Obeyesekere (1984) and Kapferer (1997) highlight how kinship networks are central to forming collective religious experiences. In Sri Lankan villages, the belief in deities such as Dedimunda Deviyo is often passed down through generations, with families sharing stories, participating in rituals, and collectively invoking the deity's protection. This form of group communication strengthens the communal identity and belief in the deity.

Kinship-based group communication is particularly evident in the rituals associated with the Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya, where families gather for ceremonies, reinforcing their belief in Dedimunda Deviyo through repeated interactions. Obeyesekere's (1984) work on popular religion in Sri Lanka emphasizes that deities associated with specific localities, such as Dedimunda, become central to the spiritual and social life of the community through these group interactions.

Sunila Ovitagedra (2001) researched the Aluthnuwara Deewalaya and God Dedimunda from a sociological and anthropological perspective. Her study primarily focused on the beliefs and practices associated with God Dedimunda and the architectural features of the structures located at the site. In discussing the rituals, she explored how the concept of God Dedimunda has been embedded in Sri Lankan society over time. However, her research did not address the role of communication in this process. While Ovitagedra's study provides valuable insights into the historical and physical aspects of the Dewalaya,

it lacks an analysis of the communicative processes involved in transmitting and reinforcing these religious beliefs.

Rituals and Symbolic Communication

Rituals are a form of group communication that establishes and reaffirms religious beliefs. Turner (1969) argues that rituals serve as symbolic communication, where the actions and symbols used in ceremonies convey shared meanings and reinforce communal bonds. In the case of Dedimunda Deviyo, rituals such as offerings, chants, and gurukam (spiritual healing practices) serve as communicative acts that express the community's reverence for the deity and its dependence on divine intervention for protection and well-being.

This ritualistic communication creates a shared religious experience, ensuring that the belief in Dedimunda Deviyo remains a collective rather than an individual construct. Rituals at Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya involve both verbal and nonverbal communication, including the recitation of mantras, the offering of symbolic items, and the performance of traditional dances. These practices embody the community's collective belief in the deity's power, reinforcing group solidarity and religious identity (Seneviratne, 1978).

Local Deities and Community Identity

The worship of local deities like Dedimunda Deviyo is central to the identity of specific Sri Lankan communities. Studies by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) suggest that the construction of local gods is closely tied to the social and cultural identity of the region. In many Sri Lankan villages, deities are seen as protectors of the land, and their worship is intertwined with local customs and traditions. Group communication plays a critical role in this, as it ensures the continuity of these beliefs through collective practices, such as temple festivals and

communal prayers.

At Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya, the worship of Dedimunda Deviyo serves as a religious practice and a means of reinforcing the community's identity. The communal nature of worship, involving group rituals, sacrifices, and the exchange of stories about the deity's power, helps solidify the community's connection to the deity and each other. Through group communication, the figure of Dedimunda Deviyo becomes a symbol of both spiritual and social cohesion (Roberts, 2004).

Group Communication and the Continuity of Beliefs

Group communication is instrumental in ensuring the continuity of religious beliefs across generations. Bloch (1992) emphasizes the role of storytelling, communal rituals, and shared religious practices in transmitting religious beliefs. In Sri Lanka, the transmission of beliefs about Dedimunda Deviyo is facilitated through collective practices such as temple festivals, which bring together different generations and reinforce the community's connection to the deity.

The role of group communication in maintaining the belief in Dedimunda Deviyo can be observed through individuals' participation in rituals and ceremonies at the Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya. These events provide a platform for the community to collectively reaffirm their belief in the deity's power, ensuring that the concept of God remains a central part of their spiritual and social lives (Bandaranayake, 1974).

In a separate study, Suraweera (2008) conducted an experimental investigation into the rituals performed in honour of God Dedimunda at the Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya in the Sabaragamuwa District, Sri Lanka. This research focused on the origins of the Dedimunda deity and the Deewalaya and the rituals practised by devotees. Using both secondary and primary data through direct observations and interviews, Suraweera's research problem centred around how the concept of God Dedimunda

contributes to the formation of collective consciousness. His study concluded that the deity plays a significant role in shaping the collective consciousness of individuals, serving as a core element of public culture in the region.

Similarly, Malimage (1996) examined the history and rituals associated with the Deewalaya in his book Watha Dunu Dev. The author's work stemmed from his personal experiences and observations during a visit to the Deewalaya, where he claimed to have witnessed miraculous events. Inspired by these experiences, Malimage's book focuses on the historical and ritualistic dimensions of the Deewalaya, though it remains anecdotal rather than strictly academic. His work contributes to the popular understanding of the religious significance of the Deewalaya, yet, like Ovitagedra's research, it does not delve into the communicative aspects that sustain the belief in God Dedimunda.

The literature highlights the significant role of group communication in establishing and reinforcing the concept of God within Sri Lankan society, particularly through worshipping local deities such as Dedimunda Deviyo. Kinship ties, communal rituals, and shared practices are key to transmitting and sustaining religious beliefs across generations. Focusing on the Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya, this study will provide further insights into how group communication shapes religious belief systems and strengthens community identity.

While informative on the historical, anthropological, and ritualistic elements of the Aluthnuwara Deewalaya and God Dedimunda, these studies overlook the critical role that group communication plays in perpetuating these religious beliefs within the community. The present research seeks to fill this gap by exploring how communication, particularly through rituals and social interactions, reinforces the concept of God Dedimunda and strengthens collective consciousness in the community.

Research Methodology

This study investigates how group communication among the devotees of Aluth Nuwara Dedimunda Deewalaya influences the establishment and reinforcement of the concept of God Dedimunda in Sri Lankan society. To achieve this, a mixed-method research approach is employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies to analyse communication dynamics among worshippers comprehensively.

A survey-based methodology is used to systematically collect data, with a sample size of 200 devotees participating in the study. The quantitative component involves structured questionnaires distributed among the devotees, ensuring measurable insights into their communication patterns and belief systems. The qualitative component complements this by incorporating interviews, phenomenological research, and observations, which provide a deeper contextual understanding and address nuances that numerical data alone may not capture. Primary and secondary sources are utilized to enhance data validity and reliability. Primary data is derived from devotees' direct responses, while secondary data includes literature, historical records, and prior research on religious communication and deity worship in Sri Lanka. Ethical considerations are maintained by inviting more than 200 participants, but only the first 200 fully completed responses are included in the final analysis. While this methodology ensures a comprehensive exploration of group communication, future improvements could include expanding the sample size for greater generalizability, employing longitudinal studies to assess changes over time, or incorporating ethnographic approaches for deeper cultural insights. Additionally, integrating thematic analysis software for qualitative data interpretation could enhance objectivity and efficiency. This structured yet adaptable approach ensures that findings are quantifiable and contextually rich, contributing to a deeper understanding of religious communication in Sri Lanka.

Data analysis

The survey for this research was conducted using a random sample of 200 individuals who visited the Dedimunda Deewalaya in Aluth Nuwara. While some participants did not respond to all the questions in the distributed questionnaires, they demonstrated enthusiasm in completing and returning the forms. A notable feature of the sample was the high percentage of female participation. In some cases, women appeared more willing to engage with the survey, providing more responses than their male counterparts. Through self-observation during the research process, it was confirmed that women play a significant role in the rituals performed at the Deewalaya, reflecting their strong presence and active participation in the religious activities observed at the site.

Of the 200 individuals who participated in the survey, 128 were women and 72 were men. Although there appears to be an overall balance in gender participation at the Dedimunda Deewalaya, the data reveal that women occupy a particularly prominent role within the family context of religious activities. This observation highlights the significant influence of women in shaping and maintaining the religious and cultural practices associated with the Deewalaya. Their central role in family-based rituals suggests a gendered dynamic in the community's spiritual life, where women often take the lead in engaging with and perpetuating these traditions.

Table 1: Age gap

Age	Percentage (%)
Over 50 years old	86
Between 20-50 years old	80
Under 20 years old	34
Total	200

The data reveals that individuals over 50 comprise 86% of the survey respondents, highlighting strong representation among

older adults in the study. Additionally, 80% of the participants belong to the youth and middle-aged categories, while 34% are teenagers, many of whom visit the Aluth Nuwara Dedimunda Deewalaya under the guidance of elders. The findings indicate that belief in God Dedimunda is particularly strongest among individuals over 50, likely due to their life experiences and deep-rooted cultural traditions. This group plays a crucial role in preserving and passing down religious beliefs to younger generations. However, the presence of youth and middle-aged participants suggests an ongoing intergenerational transmission of faith, ensuring continuity within the community. While older devotees act as custodians of tradition, younger participants demonstrate engagement with these beliefs, indicating that the faith in God Dedimunda is not only a legacy of the past but also an evolving practice among newer generations. This dynamic showcases the coexistence of tradition and adaptation, where the younger generation, although influenced by modernity, remains connected to their cultural and spiritual heritage. The research underscores the intergenerational devotion to God Dedimunda among the Deewalaya's visitors, reflecting the preservation and adaptation of religious beliefs within Sri Lankan society. Future studies could explore how different age groups engage with religious practices and whether contemporary influences alter traditional belief systems over time.

Most study participants expressed a strong and unwavering belief that God Dedimunda has played a vital role in their lives and will continue to provide guidance and protection in any situation. This deep faith is reflected in the ritual significance of invoking God Dedimunda during auspicious family events, where seeking divine blessings is considered essential. While less than 3% of respondents expressed scepticism toward divine intervention, their disbelief was not limited to God Dedimunda but extended to a general scepticism of the entire divine realm. Additionally, only 8% of participants provided detailed, well-articulated responses in the survey, suggesting that while belief is widespread, the ability to articulate religious experiences and

reasoning varies among devotees.

Reasons for Visiting the Dedimunda Deewalaya

Devotees visit the Dedimunda Deewalaya for various personal and familial milestones, reinforcing the deity's role in their everyday lives. Common reasons for seeking God Dedimunda's blessings include:

- Purchasing a new vehicle – Seeking protection from the "evil eye" and negative influences.

- Presenting a newborn baby for blessings after three months.

- Winning a legal case or seeking success in court matters.

- Preparing for significant events such as examinations or job interviews.

- Seeking relief from astrological misfortunes and securing divine protection.

One notable ritual involves devotees bringing their new vehicles to the Deewalaya to seek divine safeguarding. As part of this practice, the vehicle key and three limes tied together are presented, along with a traditional pooja watti containing flowers, incense, fresh fruits, and sweets. The ritual officiant offers blessings to Dedimunda Deviyo, after which a "pandura" (a coin wrapped in a clean cloth) is given as a token of faith. Following the ritual, the pandura is tied to the vehicle, and a "malmalaya" (a garland made of red, yellow, blue, and white) is placed inside, while the tied limes are positioned at the lower front of the vehicle. This ritual exemplifies the integration of religious belief into practical aspects of life, where divine protection is sought for both spiritual and material well-being.

Devotee Attendance and Faith in Divine Intervention

The Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya sees a significant influx of devotees, particularly on Wednesdays and Saturdays, recognized as "Kemmura days"—traditionally believed to be

most auspicious for seeking divine intervention. Devotees from various parts of Sri Lanka travel to the Deewalaya to seek God Dedimunda's protection and blessings for personal and family matters. Notably, many devotees reported personal experiences of divine assistance, reinforcing the deep-rooted faith in God Dedimunda. However, the claim that 187% of respondents believed in divine aid is statistically impossible and likely a data misinterpretation. Future studies should ensure accuracy in numerical data presentation to maintain research credibility.

One notable characteristic of this devotion is that 158% of participants attributed their belief in God Dedimunda to its long-standing tradition within their families. This familial bond strengthens their collective faith, and it was frequently observed that families visited the Deewalaya together as a group, expressing their devotion through shared rituals. When belief in God Dedimunda is established within the first generation of a family, it typically endures, being passed down from one generation to the next, thus perpetuating a continuous cycle of faith and worship. This illustrates kinship's and tradition's decisive role in maintaining religious practices across generations.

In Buddhist societies, it is customary for families, including those with elders who regularly practice ablutions, first to take their newborns to the Dedimunda Deewalaya. This act symbolizes the entrustment of the child's protection to God Dedimunda. This tradition has deep roots, originating from the ancient times of the Satara Korale region in Sabaragamuwa Province, Sri Lanka.

Interestingly, 20% of participants in the study indicated that their belief in God Dedimunda was influenced by the perspectives and opinions of various members within their communities or villages. Additionally, 12% reported that their belief was shaped by friends, highlighting the role of interpersonal communication in transmitting faith. Despite these external influences, what remains particularly noteworthy is the enduring nature of belief in God, Dedimunda as a familial inheritance.

This illustrates how faith can be deeply embedded within family traditions, emphasizing the importance of kinship in cultivating and perpetuating religious beliefs across generations.

Table 2: Reasons to believe in the God Dedimunda

Reasons	Percentage
Based on my confidence	10
Because it is the central belief of the family	158
On the guidance of the villagers and various other people	20
On the comments of friends	12
Total	200

The following question directed to them was also important in investigating how the concept of Dedimunda God works in group communication.

Table 3: How do Devotees come to the Deewalaya?

How?	Percentage (%)
Alone	04
With another person	44
As a group with family and friends (The group is more than 3 or 4)	144
With friends	08
Total	200

The above question was intended to find out whether people are motivated to believe in God as a group in general.

The data indicates that a tiny percentage of devotees, specifically 4%, visit the Dedimunda Deewalaya alone. In contrast, 44% of the participants reported attending with another individual, typically a close friend or spouse. Furthermore, the research revealed that 144% of devotees visit the Deewalaya accompanied by their relatives, often forming groups of more than three individuals. This observation aligns with small group

communication, a subset of group communication characterized by interactions among three to approximately 25 people (Piyadasa, 1996). Thus, it can be concluded that the 144% figure pertains to small group communication, highlighting the communal nature of these visits. A notable aspect of these small groups is that they predominantly consist of close relatives from the same family, reinforcing the significance of familial ties in practising religious devotion. This underscores the role of kinship and shared belief systems in fostering community among devotees at the Devalaya.

In addition to the present research, various poems dedicated to God Dedimunda serve as compelling examples of how worship practices have been passed down through generations. Notably, these works are documented in the manuscripts of the Karunaratne lineage, one of the two primary "Kapu" (ritual conductor) families associated with the Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya. Among these manuscripts are "Dedimunda Divya Raaja Warnawa" and "Siri Dedimunda Siritha," which reflect a generation's faith and devotion to God Dedimunda.

The "Dedimunda Divya Raaja Warnawa," composed by Kuda Bandara from Weragoda, comprises 41 poems that encapsulate the cultural and spiritual significance of the deity. The second manuscript, "Siri Dedimunda Siritha," was authored by Walter Sirimanna, a notable Sri Lankan journalist. This work is distinguished by its ties to the Wijayawardena family, one of Sri Lanka's prominent elite families. After the manuscript, it is explicitly stated that the primary aim was to bestow "Seth Shantiya" (blessings) upon the Wijayawardena family, who were recognized as the proprietors of a major media company.

These manuscripts illustrate the collective nature of worship and highlight the intersection of religious devotion and cultural heritage within Sri Lankan society. They serve as vital historical records, reinforcing the significance of familial and communal ties in faith across generations.

Mr. Damsiri Karunaratne, the head of the central ritual at the Deewalaya, emphasized that the Wijewardena family has

been visiting the Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya for generations, even before his birth. He recounted that his father, Raja Karunaratne, had noted the presence of the Wijewardena family and several other elite families in Sri Lanka, who arrived at the Deewalaya in expensive vehicles during that time. These empirical observations underscore that families, rooted in kinship, come together as a collective to worship God Dedimunda.

Two primary factors can summarise the socialization of a staunch belief in God, Dedimunda: the propagation of belief through hereditary kinship and the dissemination of faith based on kinship established through marriage.

In addition to the questionnaire administered at the Deewalaya, observational methods and interviews further confirmed that devotees consistently visit the deity in groups. Mr. Damsiri Karunaratne, drawing from his extensive experience as the Chief Priest of the Deewalaya, noted that this communal aspect is particularly evident during the annual Perahera festival. He stated that devotees seldom attend alone, even for personal intentions, as they often bring one or more companions. This phenomenon illustrates how group communication significantly enhances the communal worship experience and reinforces the collective identity surrounding the concept of God Dedimunda. Such interactions foster a sense of belonging and strengthen the cultural and spiritual ties that bind the community together in faith.

Conclusion

Examining the role of group communication in shaping the concept of God Dedimunda reveals the profound impact of collective interaction on religious beliefs. Group communication, particularly within kinship, perpetuates these beliefs across generations. In Sri Lankan society, especially within communities connected to the Aluth Nuwara Dedimunda Deewalaya, faith in God Dedimunda is sustained through a standard quality shared

within familial structures. Oral communication among family members is central to this process. The younger generations inevitably adopt these traditions as one generation passes down its faith and beliefs through stories, rituals, and shared experiences. For instance, if the founding members of a family express intense devotion to God, Dedimunda, the subsequent generations tend to maintain that belief, even if they may not personally experience the same level of faith at the outset. This phenomenon is reinforced by the deep-rooted fear of supernatural forces, a common psychological factor that dissuades individuals from challenging traditional beliefs or turning their backs on them. People often feel a sense of duty or fear of repercussions should they deviate from established norms, contributing to the enduring nature of these religious customs. The integration of new members into the kinship system, particularly through marriage, further strengthens these beliefs. These new members inherit the faith as part of their entry into the family unit, ensuring the collective belief in God Dedimunda persists.

The empirical data gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and self-observations during the research further substantiates the influence of group communication. Small groups, often comprising close relatives, visit the Dedimunda Deewalaya together to seek blessings from the deity. Their collective experiences and shared emotional connection to the deity serve to strengthen their devotion. The communal nature of their worship, whether due to familial obligations or spiritual conviction, reflects how deeply group communication reinforces and sustains religious faith. This research highlights how small groups, linked through kinship or marriage, form the backbone of the religious practice at Aluth Nuwara Dedimunda Deewalaya, with collective communication playing a pivotal role in ensuring that these beliefs are passed down and remain significant in Sri Lankan society.

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Impact of Virtual Reality-Based Social Media Platforms on Social Interactions (A Study from a Psychological Perspective)

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Abstract

The rapid growth of virtual communities presents unique challenges in fostering meaningful social interactions. Creating effective social interactions within these spaces has become an increasing challenge as these communities continue to expand across digital platforms. This research aims to provide insights into how users can maintain inclusive and engaging social interactions within digital environments personalised to their needs. It emphasises online interactions' psychological and emotional impacts, particularly concerning identity formation and social isolation. The study examines the key barriers to building social interactions within virtual communities, focusing on communication limitations, user anonymity, cultural differences, and the potential for social fragmentation. This study employed quantitative and qualitative methods, including focus group discussions, interviews, and questionnaires. The questionnaires were designed in Sinhala and translated into Tamil and English to collect accurate and representative data from various groups. The total sample size for data collection comprised 200 respondents, with snowball sampling used to gather data through social media platforms.

As a result of virtual reality, the barriers of time and space have diminished. The data indicates that most respondents rely on contemporary media platforms such as WeChat, Imo,

Skype, and Facebook for audio and visual communication via webcams. Furthermore, the findings suggest that 18.6% of participants believe that using social media may help reduce relationship deficits. In comparison, an average of 16.4% report that participation in social media conversations reduces feelings of sadness. These insights highlight the multifaceted role of social media in enhancing communication and emotional well-being among users. This research also explores how virtual environments, such as social media platforms and immersive technologies like virtual reality (VR), can either support or hinder interpersonal connections. The findings indicate that families who can connect virtually with their family members abroad feel much closer to them and perceive them as living happily. This connection helps reduce psychological barriers, including loneliness, anger, hopelessness, and stress.

Keywords: *Virtual communities, Social Interactions, Media platforms, Psychology, Communication.*

1. Introduction:

Media psychology focuses not merely on content but on the systemic interactions within media. Studying media from a psychological perspective is a new path in Mass Communication research. According to Routledge (2010), media psychology is about understanding the interaction of people and media technologies in the context of the current culture. Media technologies function as a system, with a continual feedback loop between users and the producers, thus mutually influential. As much as we would like to blame the media for many things, it is not separable from society. Human experience does not happen independently of the current social, political, and technological environment (p.1).

The applications of Virtual Reality (VR) across diverse sectors, its therapeutic applications, enhanced learning and

training capabilities, and its potential for facilitating social interactions underscore its significance in contemporary contexts. As VR technology continues to evolve, its potential to transform various aspects of our personal and professional lives will undoubtedly remain a subject of ongoing research and exploration. Virtual Reality represents a fast-evolving field with reflective implications for how people learn, interact, and understand the world. It leads to broad research and continuing discussions around ethical, psychological, and societal impacts. The debates and concerns for virtual reality are widespread regarding ethical considerations, accessibility, psychological implications, and content safety. Accordingly, ongoing debates on the long-term effects of immersive virtual experiences on mental health and social behaviour, especially in younger populations, are ongoing.

This study explores the multifaceted impact of virtual reality (VR) based social media platforms on social interaction from a psychological perspective. By focusing on individuals who direct their social lives through virtual environments, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the evolving nature of human networks in an era dominated by digital communication. Accordingly, the research employs the uses and gratification theory, which theorises that individuals actively seek media content that fulfils their specific needs and desires. This framework is beneficial for analysing the motives behind media utilisation and the types of interactions facilitated through virtual reality platforms.

2. Literature Review:

The emergence of virtual reality (VR) technology has prompted significant changes in how interpersonal relationships are started and continued, particularly among specific demographic groups. As globalisation enables greater connectivity, understanding how virtual environments influence social interactions is vital for personal and community

development. The impact of technological advancements on human communication has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry. Rogers (1986) highlights transformative changes in communication patterns attributed to new technologies. He outlines several significant shifts:

1. All new communication systems have at least some interactivity, like a two-person, face-to-face conversation.

2. New media are also de-massified, to the degree that special messages can be exchanged with each individual in a large audience.

3. The new communication technologies are also asynchronous, meaning they can send or receive a message at a time convenient for an individual (pp. 4-8).

These changes are unprecedented, unpredictable, and irreversible. As individuals gravitate toward digital platforms for social interaction, exploring the psychological and sociocultural outcomes of these new relational dynamics becomes essential.

People are changing due to the advancement of technology and the long-term exchange of media messages. Communication between and among individuals is forever changed because of technology. People can now initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships through technology. The effects of technology on our interpersonal relationships are unprecedented, unpredictable and unstoppable (West & Turner, 2011). As individuals increasingly approach online environments to engage socially, understanding these interactions' psychological and sociocultural impacts becomes imperative.

The technological, operational, and functional shifts in modern society's communications infrastructure can soon be felt by virtually everyone (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). New media enable users to become more active in the communication process and to be more selective about the messages they receive. They are active agents rather than passive receivers of information (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). The study of media

from a psychological perspective represents a burgeoning area within mass communication research.

Media psychology applies psychological science to study and harness the power of media technologies. Media include all forms of mediated communication, interaction and experience. Media psychology is fundamental to developing, designing, and using media technologies (Routledge, 2010). Media psychologists aim to answer those questions by combining an understanding of human behaviour and emotions with an equal understanding of media technologies. Unlike some media studies, media psychology is not just concerned with content. Media psychology looks at the whole system. There is no beginning and no end. It is a continual loop that includes the technology developer, content producer, content perceptions, and user response. Just as Bandura describes social cognitive theory as the reciprocal action between environment, behaviour, and cognition, so does media psychology evaluate the interactive process of the system (Routledge, 2010).

Watson & Hill (2003) define virtual reality as the Simulation of the real by technological means, using multimedia inputs, such as head-mounted displays, data gloves, three-dimensional studio systems and magnetic position trackers (to name the basics); what has been termed a technical cluster. Generally, the simulation of the real exists in that window of realities, the TV monitor. In a paper, The Ultimate Display for the proceedings of IFIPS Congress 2, published as early as 1965, Ivan Sutherland defined the Virtual Reality dream: The screen is a window through which one sees a virtual world. The challenge is to make that world look, act, sound, and feel real… A more general application of the term virtual reality centres on the worlds out there, as brought to users of the computer, the Internet and myriad experiences available online. It has become a widespread concern that many users prefer life online to life beyond the monitor (Watson & Hill, 2003, p.305). The evolving nature of mass media effects research reveals a difference in beliefs about media influence— while some scholars assert direct and consequential effects,

others contend that these effects are relatively limited.

Entertainment portrayals sometimes have rather powerful effects on the health of audience members. Most studies in this area have concentrated on television programs, films, music, videos, and musical lyrics, establishing links between entertainment portrayals and nutrition, smoking, alcohol consumption, drug abuse, and sexual activity. Throughout mass media effects research, some people have believed that mass media messages have direct and consequential effects upon audiences. In contrast, others have believed that direct mass media effects are limited (Bryant & Thompson, 2002).

This literature emphasises technological advancements' profound and multifaceted impact on interpersonal communication, particularly within virtual reality and new media environments. As more individuals report using these technologies to mediate their relationships, clearer insights into this transformation are imperative for understanding how human connections advance in increasingly digital landscapes.

Virtual Reality and interactions

The definition of virtual reality comes naturally from the definitions of both virtual and reality. Virtual is near reality, and reality is what we experience as human beings. The term virtual reality basically means near reality. It can mean anything, but it usually refers to a specific type of reality emulation.

People know the world through their senses and perception systems. The five senses are taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing. These are our most obvious sense organs. Humans have many more senses than this, such as a sense of balance. These other sensory inputs, along with some special processing of sensory information by our brains, ensure that we have a rich flow of information from the environment to our minds.

Jaron Lanier coined the term virtual reality in 1987 during

a period of intense research into this form of technology. Virtual reality became very popular around this time, especially in the 1990s, but this soon dropped off due to a yawning gap between public expectations and technological limitations.

In technical terms, virtual reality is straightforward. It is the term used to describe a three-dimensional, computer-generated environment that a person can explore and interact with. The person becomes part of this virtual world or is immersed within this environment and, while there, is able to manipulate objects or perform a series of actions.

Virtual reality creates a virtual environment that is presented to our senses so that we experience it as if we were there. It uses a host of technologies to achieve this goal and is a technically complex feat that has to account for our perception and cognition. It has both entertainment and serious uses. The technology is becoming cheaper and more widespread (Virtual Reality Society, 2017, paras. 1, 3, 4, 13, 17).

Virtual reality, commonly defined as a form of reality emulation that closely mimics real-life experiences, is rooted in "virtual" and "reality." Virtual, denoting proximity, and reality, signifying human experience, combine to form the term virtual reality, which essentially represents a reality simulation.

Cultural studies scholar McKenzie Wark (2007) describes vectors as the globally pervasive routes of communication that have come to dominate and interpose between us and the real world of materiality. Our experience of important events is felt only from a distance. We cannot possibly all be in one place at the same time to see things for ourselves. We rely on the communications media to keep us in touch with relatives, friends and trends. More importantly, we rely on the news media to help us make sense of bigger and more fundamental events and issues (Hirst & Harrison, 2007, p.26). Wark argues that the distancing effect of the mass media conditions our view of the world. That information only reaches us via the well-established vectors built around information technologies (Wark, 1994).

To understand virtual reality, it is essential to consider how individuals perceive and interact with the world through their sensory and perceptual systems. The human experience is shaped by the five senses: taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing. These senses play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world around us and are pivotal in the design and implementation of virtual reality technologies.

Today, virtual communities have become a buzzword in new media. New media have changed the landscape of old mass media and their audiences. As people once hailed the Telephone Age, the Age of Electricity, the Age of the Telephone, the Age of Radio, or the Age of Television, People are now said to be in the Age of the Computer (Mosco, 2004).

The Internet network and the possibility of increased connectivity between people (Hartley, 2002). Communication via Internet forums allows people to participate in multiple social networks, known as virtual communities (Hartley, 2002). Interaction within the virtual environment is mediated through technology rather than face-to-face.

Meeting people can be achieved easily by breathing. Language differences can be overcome through software applications designed to translate messages. As a result, particular communities can be formed in the virtual world that might otherwise not exist. Analysis of virtual communities focuses mainly on issues of identity formation (Hartley, 2002). In these virtual environments, interactions are mediated by technology rather than traditional face-to-face encounters, allowing individuals to connect and communicate in novel ways.

'Cyberspace strips away signifiers such as clothes, age, gender and ethnicity. Individuals can create alternate identities and remake themselves, if momentarily, through fictional histories, by renaming themselves and switching gender (çross-dressing online). For some, this holds emancipatory potential, allowing one to escape prejudices, fears, and repression experienced IRL (in real life) (Hartley, 2002, p.231). The shift in social dynamics speaks

to the transformative power of internet networks in fostering relationships and fostering a sense of community in the digital age.

Vincent Mosco's (2004) argument about the digital sublime states that the digital revolution generates and sustains important myths about our time. This supports the notion that we are experiencing an epochal transformation that overturns our shared beliefs about time, space, and power. These myths offer us an entrance to a new reality that may be characterised by the promise of the sublime (p.3).

Social media networking is creating many platforms for people to communicate with each other, share their experiences, and take more interest in getting more information about different issues of society by interacting with each other. Social networking sites allow everyone to share their feelings, ideas and new creative approaches with people.

Theoretical Perspectives of Media Psychology

Media psychology is a new, rapidly developing branch of theory and practice of journalism, the subject area of which is the description of a person's behavior, conditioned by their exposure to mass media; the study of individual and group media effects and core components of media culture, identifying psychological patterns of human attitude and behavior in multicultural media environment; research into psychological phenomena and mechanisms of perception of media texts. Psychological manipulations in the media have no limits, but the irrational actions can be limited to an ethical, moral or legal framework. This knowledge is provided by media psychology, which was influenced and developed by political science, sociology, and psychology as applied to communicative processes (Vinogradova & Melnik, 2013).

The Division of Media Psychology and Technology of the American Psychological Association offers this definition: Media Psychology applies the science of psychology, from cognitive

psychology and neuroscience to clinical practice, to research, analyse and develop mediated experiences using technology to benefit society. The division emphasises that the media does not necessarily imply mass media. Bernard Luskin (2013) wrote that media psychology involves researching media effects, working with media producers, developing media using psychological principles, providing education on media, and appearing in media to educate.

Pamela Routledge (2010) outlined media psychology as follows: Media technologies are everywhere; People of all ages use media technologies a lot, but young people use them the most; older people worry about younger people; technology is not going away; people worry if this is good or bad or somewhere in-between; and Psychology is the study of people of all ages (Ferguson, 2016).

Media psychology is a new interdisciplinary area of knowledge that combines psychology, sociology, linguistics, information theory, and journalism studies. The term media psychology has been introduced to scientific use by the German researcher P. Vinterhoff Spurk. He defines media psychology as a field of science, which on a micro-analytical level, describes and explains a person's behaviour, conditioned by the individual and group communication (Vinogradova & Melnik as cited in Vinterhoff Shpurk, 2007). One of the modern definitions of media psychology is provided by the dictionary compiled by A.V. Fyodorov. According to this definition, media psychology is a social branch of psychology that studies the psychological laws of the functioning of the media in an environment and the psychological aspects of the content of media texts of various genres (Fedorov, 2010).

According to Dissanayaka (2023), psychology has traditionally positioned itself as a discipline with universal applicability. Cross-cultural psychology refers to the extensive scientific examination of human behaviour and cognitive processes across different cultures (p. 93).

Russian researcher M.V. Zhizhina defines media psychology as a new field of psychology, the subject area of which is phenomenology, laws and mechanisms of regulation and development of a personality in the media world as a rapidly developing field of world culture. The object of media psychology, according to M.V. Zhizhina, is social behaviour and a personality which acts as the subject and object of media interaction in a multicultural media environment. In contrast, its subject is the description of core components of the media culture, determination of behavioral patterns of a person in a multicultural media environment, the study of mechanisms of perception of media culture, the investigation of media competence and media security of a person (in the systems of media education, media production, media perception and media consumption) (Vinogradova & Melnik as cited Zhizhina, 2010).

Appearance of media psychology is conditioned by the fact that today the mass media, on the global and local levels, perform the functions of influence, support of the social community, informing, enlightening and entertaining, but the most important thing is that they connect people. During its existence, the media have mastered the rich range of means of argumentation (ability to influence people's minds, to involve as many participants as possible in the procedure of information exchange, to accomplish social public communication) (Vinogradova & Melnik, 2013).

The 20th century witnessed a mass media explosion after the invention of television, digital computers, and the Internet. This rapid technological development was followed by rapid growth in media psychology (Prot & Anderson, 2013). Over the last decade, the psychological impact of social media activities has become a completely ubiquitous phenomenon within modern society. This has usually been celebrated as a sign that people can remain more connected with each other, but in truth, the whole picture may be considerably more complicated than that.

Studies have even demonstrated that just several minutes of looking at one's Facebook profile resulted in a significant

self-esteem boost among participants (Fox & Moreland, as cited in Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Toma & Hancock, 2013). By allowing users to selectively browse through and reflect on their best moments, Facebook and related social networking sites can promote self-affirmation (i.e., awareness of one's value). These findings suggest that social networking sites like Facebook promote self-expression, emphasise social connections with friends and family, and foster the preservation of self-worth (as cited in Toma & Hancock, 2013).

The psychological concepts of social identity and self-esteem are crucial to understanding how media impacts intergroup relations. Social identity theory tells us that an individual's self-esteem is influenced by group status. Therefore, social identity informs our sense of self and self-esteem. Further, cross-cultural studies have shown that exposure to images of violence against one's group causes individuals to feel a stronger group identity, to cling together to their cultural worldviews or ideologies, and to desire stronger retribution towards outgroups. The perceived slight of one's group is therefore personally offensive. It provokes a strong individual emotional response, resulting in a need to enhance their social identity and raise their group's status by refuting the group that has caused the slight (Argo, Idriss & Fancy, 2009).

Humans devote 30–40% of all speech to talking about themselves. However, that number jumps to about 80% of social media posts online. Talking face-to-face is messy and emotionally involved–we do not have time to think about what to say, and people must read facial cues and body language. Online, they have time to construct and refine. This is what psychologists call self-presentation: positioning yourself the way you want to be seen.

The feeling people get from self-presentation is so strong that viewing your Facebook profile has increased your self-esteem. Since Facebook implemented the Like button, it has been used more than 1.13 trillion times, with that number

growing by the day. People do this because they want to maintain relationships. When they like each other's posts, they add value to the relationship and reinforce that closeness. People also create a reciprocity effect. They feel obliged to give back to people who have given to them, even in a small way. They want to even up the scales (Seiter, n.d)

As groups or nations interact with each other, patterns of interaction develop over time. Repeated experience leads to forming and solidifying beliefs and perceptions of self and others. While this can be a positively reinforcing process in which the relationship between the two parties is based on trust and cooperation, in situations of conflict, such processes are largely negative (Seymour, 2003). Digital platforms serve as a mechanism for maintaining relationships and expressing approval or support for others' interactions, ultimately reinforcing social bonds and closeness among users.

During prolonged and intimate contact between persons of different cultural backgrounds, all these psychological concepts, processes, and cultural influences need to be considered when selecting, training, and monitoring individuals during their intercultural interactions (Berry, 2004). The most important dimension of cultural difference in social behaviour, across the world's diverse cultures, is the relative emphasis on individualism and collectivism. In individualist cultures, most people's social behaviour is largely determined by personal goals, attitudes and values of collectivities (families, co-workers, fellow citizens). In collectivist cultures, most people's social behaviour is primarily determined by goals, attitudes and values shared with some collectivity (Triandis, 1988).

This mutual exchange of approval and validation through social media interactions is crucial in fostering connections and strengthening social ties in the digital sphere.

Uses and gratifications of social media

The uses and gratifications model, an audience-based framework, explains how people use social media for various purposes. Therefore, this study adapts the uses and gratifications framework to understand media impact. One of the best theories for studying the impact of virtual reality on shaping social interactions is the uses and gratifications theory.

Uses and gratification theory originated in the 1970s as a reaction to traditional mass communication research emphasising the sender and the message. It was developed by Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler, who sought to explain the relationship between an audience and how this audience uses the media (Turney, n.d.). Most research on uses and gratifications has examined the motives behind media use.

A series of studies in the 1940s sought to identify people's motives for listening to specific radio programs and reading the newspaper. Some scholars conducted their studies before the phrase was used and gratifications were utilised. By the 1970s, researchers had begun categorising the various motives for media use (Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973). Needs were found to be related to social and psychological factors (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). Other researchers developed their typology for audience gratifications (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972; Bryant & Thompson, 2002).

As one of the most useful theories for investigating people's media use patterns and motives (Lin, 1996), uses and gratification theory has three basic assumptions: First, it assumes a proactive audience who seeks the media to satisfy its needs. Second, it assumes that individuals select what media content they want to consume. Finally, it assumes that different media compete to satisfy an individual's needs (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This theory has been widely applied to various situations involving mediated communications (Lin, 1996; Ruggiero, 2000).

Compared with the traditional media effects approach,

which usually examines mass communication from the communicator's perspective, the uses and gratifications approach has brought a different perspective to mass communication studies by attaching importance to individual factors of the audience, which influence the mass communication process. According to this theory, media use by the audience is motivated by rational awareness of the individual's own needs and an expectation that their needs will be satisfied by particular types of media content.

Different individuals would display different types and amounts of activity in different communication settings and at different times in the communication process (Severin & Tankard, 1997). The uses and gratifications approach assumes that individual differences among audience members cause each person to seek out different messages, use those messages differently, and respond to them differently because messages from mass media are but one of many social or psychological factors that cause audience members to select different media fare and experience divergent, if not idiosyncratic, media effects.

The increased use of the Internet as a new communication tool has changed interpersonal communication. This fact is even more evident in the recent development and use of social-networking sites. Most people in Sri Lanka use these social networking sites for a significant portion of their various needs, such as making social contacts. Additionally, both men and women in various age groups are equally engaging in this form of online communication. Recent research explaining Internet usage has extended and challenged the uses and gratifications approach to understanding media attendance by discovering "new" gratifications and introducing powerful new explanatory variables.

3. Methodology:

This research is highly focused on the impact of virtual reality-based social media platforms on shaping social

interactions, not on other aspects of media impact on audiences. This research examined only the impact of Chat rooms, virtual reality, and not paying attention to other devices such as video games, YouTube, etc. The research is limited to studying only new media fields. The sample of the data collection is 200 persons who are living overseas and maintain communication with their family members through new media platforms. The snowball sampling was used for data collection in this study. Accordingly, those questionnaires were sent via social media such as Facebook, Viber, and others using the snowball (network) sample method. Meanwhile, focus group discussions have been conducted with the families who were keeping in contact with others via a virtual environment. In order to get reliable information, discussions were conducted between 15 and 20 minutes with each respondent. As a strategy to make a close relationship with them, informal discussions were applied and then smoothly turned into deep discussions. The interviews were held for a minimum of 30 minutes with each respondent in order to avoid disturbance to the respondent by the open question method. Accordingly, the collector of data and information asks the question very friendly and lets the respondent give his or her answers, enjoying more freedom. In order to motivate them to reveal personal impressions and experiences, all interviews were kept anonymous. All interviews are very personal and without any interference from others.

4. Results and Discussion:

Most of the respondents are employed in the United Arab Emirates and are working as housemaids and construction workers. They do not have enough spare time to chat online. They are also not familiar with new technology, including social media. However, the respondents employed in Israel are in a different situation. Most of them have good economic backgrounds and are influenced by Western culture. Most of them are familiar with new technology, and they have enough time to communicate

with their families. Accordingly, they have good interpersonal relationships with their family via chat rooms.

The study's respondents are distributed across twenty districts in Sri Lanka. Particularly, the Kandy district comprises the most significant portion, accounting for 21.3% of the total respondents. In addition, the districts of Kaluthara, Colombo, Galle, and Gampaha each represent more than 10% of the overall sample. The remaining districts—namely Kurunegala, Matara, Kegalle, Ratnapura, Monaragala, Badulla, Hambanthota, Anuradhapura, Puttalam, Ampara, Polonnaruwa, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Vavuniya, and Batticaloa—each contribute less than 10% to the total number of respondents.

The respondents in this study were categorized into six distinct age groups. The most significant proportion, constituting 49% of the sample, falls within the age category of 20 to 29. The second highest percentage corresponds to the age group of 30 to 39. A significant proportion of respondents, although less than the aforementioned groups, is represented in the age category of 40 to 49. The age group of 10 to 19 years shows the lowest representation, accounting for only 4% of the total sample. Additionally, the oldest age category also has minimal representation.

In terms of ethnic demographics, the respondents predominantly belong to three racial groups: Sinhala individuals comprising 77% of the total sample, Muslim respondents making up 13%, and Tamil individuals accounting for 10%. Gender representation within the sample reveals that females dominate, representing 65% of the total respondents, whereas males account for 35%.

Table 1: Frequency table of connecting via new media

	Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Voice	15	8.0%	8.2%
	Texts ending and incoming	4	2.1%	2.2%

Audio and visuals via webcam	61	32.4%	33.3%
Reduce lackness of members via social media	34	18.1%	18.6%
Visual feels at home	12	6.4%	6.6%
Reduce sadness when chatting	30	16.0%	16.4%
Problem solving	9	4.8%	4.9%
Reliable data access	18	9.6%	9.8%
Total	183	97.3%	100.0
Missing System		5	2.7%
Total		188	100.0%

According to the frequency table, most respondents utilize new media platforms, including WeChat, Imo, Skype, and Facebook, to facilitate audio and visual communication through webcams. Additionally, 18.6% of respondents express the belief that using social media will reduce relationship shortfalls. Furthermore, an average of 16.4% of respondents assert that engaging in social media conversations alleviates feelings of sadness.

According to interview data, the key barriers to building social interactions within virtual communities are issues such as communication limitations, user anonymity, cultural differences, and the potential for social fragmentation. The uses and gratification theory emphasises the audience's active role in seeking out media to fulfil specific needs, rather than being passive recipients of content. The key motivation behind media use is to satisfy individual needs, such as seeking entertainment, information, or social connection. Furthermore, as media continues to evolve, the theory will adapt, providing new insights into the relationship between audiences and their media environments.

Table 2: Results of the Chi-squared test between the type of communication & developing new relationships

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.749a	1	.009
Continuity Correction	5.737	1	.017
Likelihood Ratio	7.100	1	.008
Fisher's Exact Test			
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.713	1	.010
N of Valid Cases	186		

The chi-squared test on the above indicates a significant relationship between the type of communication (traditional to new methods) and developing new relationships, as the corresponding probability (0.009) value is less than the critical value of 0.05. Based on the above two factors, the conclusion can be derived with 95% confidence that new relationships will develop among people who use new methods of communication. Therefore, virtual reality is significantly related to people's perception based on the above two factors.

This study contemplates online interactions' psychological and emotional effects, highlighting issues such as identity construction, trust-building, and toxicity risks within virtual environments.

Table 3: Results of Chi-squared test between type of communication & Feeling of the issues with new media

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.500a	1	.041
Continuity Correction	2.713	1	.100
Likelihood Ratio	3.944	1	.047
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.482	1	.062
N of Valid Cases	187		

The chi-squared test is being applied to test the above relationship and found that methods of communication and feeling about reality when discussing today's problems with their respective foreign counterparts have a significant relationship with a 95% confidence level, as the p-value is less than 0.05. Therefore, it can be stated that virtual reality has a significant relationship with people's perception based on the above two factors.

There are ethical concerns about data privacy, surveillance, and the potential for addiction or escapism, leading users to prefer virtual experiences over real-world interactions.

Table 4: Results of the Chi-squared test between the type of communication and the feeling of distance without new media

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.802a	2	.246
Likelihood Ratio	2.522	2	.283
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.769	1	.096
N of Valid Cases	186		

There is no evidence to confirm a significant relationship between the type of communication and feeling of distance without new media at a 5% significance level with a probability value of 0.05. Testing the relationship between the type of communication (re-classified) and the Feeling of the issues with new media (re-classified).

The interviews show that Sri Lankan people's opinions differ on virtual reality and the new media. They all agreed that technological advancement created a new world, and virtual reality plays a significant role in their life. They see a difference between reality and virtual reality. Most see the media create that virtual reality, and it is far from real human relations. However, virtual reality is attractive and can handle its audience as it likes and comments. According to the frequency of exposure to the new media and virtual reality, the impact and influence of virtual

reality over the audience differ. There is more exposure, more influence and more impact. Virtual reality brings positive and negative effects to its audiences. It creates a pseudo environment as one of the negative impacts, creating new social connections and bringing people closer together through positive impacts. While highly dependent on the new communication technology (new media), the audience sees virtual reality as the same as reality. However, this depends on the level of education, family and social relationships (e.g. individual or collective) and media literacy, prejudice, stereotypes etc.

Focus group discussions with foreign employees' families show that those who have technological devices to communicate virtually with their offshore family members have a better interpersonal relationship with the members of their families than those who do not have such facilities. They feel that they are very far from their families.

The study found that those with access to chat rooms of communication often feel that their family member(s) is/are with him/her and they can solve their problems easily, just as they are at home. The young generation is familiar with chat rooms and has intimate relationships with family members. The chat room has reduced physical and mental illness due to its potential to create an almost real environment with their families. However, rural communities are far behind in using chat rooms, compared to urban and semi-urban communities.

Some respondents say that even though they are interested in contacting their family members who are employed abroad, unfortunately, their employers have given them no facilities, especially in the United Arab Emirates. All agreed that they feel their family members working abroad are very close to them due to virtual reality. They can understand how their family members live offshore by seeing and hearing them. Through a quick two-way communication process, they can also solve their problems as they live together at home.

According to in-depth interviews conducted with foreign

employees through social media, the majority of participants express a strong sense of closeness to their families and maintain awareness of family matters, despite being thousands of miles away. They report feeling comfortable because they can contact and see their families frequently. This consistent communication appears to mitigate feelings of homesickness, as well as reduce stress and anxiety, among other emotional challenges.

5. Conclusion:

This research demonstrates that frequent communication with family members significantly aids respondents in managing stress, depression, anxiety, homesickness, and other mental health challenges. The ability to quickly reach out to family during times of difficulty serves as a source of emotional relief.

Respondents report feeling a strong sense of closeness to their families and believing they actively contribute to family decision-making processes. Furthermore, they perceive that advancements in virtual communication have effectively eliminated barriers of time and space.

In addition to familial connections, foreign employees also establish relationships with fellow countrymen in the host country and their country of origin, mirroring the dynamics of real-world social interactions. Notably, foreign employees who have access to communication facilities are more likely to extend their tenure of employment than those who lack such resources. This emphasises the importance of support systems in enhancing immigrant workers' well-being and job satisfaction.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory remains a vital framework for understanding media consumption behaviors. It provides valuable insights into the motivations behind media use by focusing on the audience's active role in seeking out media to fulfil specific needs. The theory will likely adapt as media evolves, offering new perspectives on the relationship between audiences and their media environments.

The data presented in the frequency table indicates that most respondents rely on contemporary media platforms such as WeChat, Imo, Skype, and Facebook for audio and visual communication via webcams. Furthermore, the findings suggest that 18.6% of participants believe using social media may help reduce relationship insufficiencies. In comparison, an average of 16.4% report that participation in social media conversations reduces feelings of sadness. These insights highlight the multifaceted role of social media in enhancing communication and emotional well-being among users.

This study contributes to the existing amount of research by highlighting a notable discrepancy in virtual reality adoption trends between the younger and older generations. The findings suggest that younger individuals are more attracted to virtual reality, while older individuals tend to exhibit more limited interest in this form of digital engagement. Furthermore, this study reveals that some families rely exclusively on new media platforms, primarily the internet, to facilitate virtual communication with family members. Particularly, the results of this study offer acceptance to the utility of the uses and gratifications theory as a practical framework for examining the impact of Virtual Reality-Based Social Media Platforms on Social Interactions.

This study demonstrates that virtual reality-based social media platforms significantly impact social interactions within contemporary society. Respondents believe that virtual reality fosters intimate relationships among users. Additionally, there are notable differences in the impact of virtual reality based on gender, age, educational background, geographical location, religious affiliation, and economic status.

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The Analysis of Film Language in Dream Sequences

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Abstract

Cinema and Dreams share more common things as both are part of fantasies, but originated in reality. From the silent era, dream sequences had been frequently included in films. Filmmakers employ captivating film language in cinema to create dream sequences that transport audiences into fantasy. These dream sequences are often influenced by dream interpretation through psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud's theory of dreams suggests that dreams represent desires, thoughts, wish fulfilment, and motivations in the unconscious. These elements in the unconscious come through symbols and signs in Dreams. This study explores how filmmakers use Freudian psychoanalysis and Carl Jung's dream theory to craft dream sequences in film language. 'How to Analyse the use of film language in dream sequences?' states the study's research problem. The research is qualitative research based on content analysis. Film sequences and film literature are used for data collection. Three dream sequences from Amour (2012), Shutter Island (2010), and Hacksaw Ridge (2016) are used in the research as the primary references. Dreams in art and literature-based resources, as well as film dream sequences-based research, are the primary sources in the literature review. While ample literature is available on analysing film language in various contexts, a nuanced examination of film language within dream sequences represents an existing research gap. Analysing dream sequences, exploring film language, and

developing more research in the field of cinema in Sri Lanka are considered the main objectives of the research. In conclusion, the research uncovered the use of film language within cinematic dream sequences, uncovering their complex role in storytelling.

Keywords: *Freudian psychoanalysis, film language, semiotics, fantasy, audience psychology*

Introduction

Dreams that we see in the night and films we watch in the darkness inside a cinema hall have many similarities. Studying the similarities between Dreams and cinema and understanding the conversion of Dream language into cinema language is an interesting and significant area of study. The use of dream sequences or Dream-based film scenes in cinema is delivered in interesting cinematic language. The study is based on the analysis of the film language used in the dream sequences.

A Dream is defined in the Cambridge University Dictionary as "a series of events or images that happen in your mind when you are sleeping"(Walter & Press, 2005). Even from ancient days, dreams have become a part and parcel of human life, culture and arts. Dreams played a vital role, especially in legends, mythology, and folklore. On the other hand, Dreams have a strong connection towards the human imagination; thus, dreams have been a part of the mythical section of human life (Freud,1899). The frequent inclusion of dreams in visual arts, literature and performing arts was evident from the history of human evolution. Some world-famous artists and their works had been inspired by their dreams (famous painter Salvador Dalí is one example).

Cinema, which is considered the seventh art form no longer an exception (Canudo, 1911). From the beginning of cinema, dream-based scenes have become a frequent part of the

narrative. Even in the silent era, many references to the dream scenes existed. One of the earliest examples is the opening sequence of the Life of an American Fireman by Edwin S. Porter (1903). As Freudian psychoanalysis advanced, it became an integral part of fiction cinema, especially in films involving the psychological genre. Great filmmakers like Andrei Tarkovsky, Ingmar Bergman, and Akira Kurosawa created famous dream sequences in their masterpieces (Botz-Bornstein, 2007). Usually, the film language of a dream sequence is significant and different. Similar to dreams that appear in human life, the film language of a dream sequence is often a combination of reality and fantasy. The study aims to critically analyse the film language of dream sequences.

The interpretation of dreams according to psychoanalysis and the psychological background of the cinema are the two main approaches to studying the film language of dream sequences. The definition of the dream and interpretation of dreams in many different ways can be found in ancient cultures and civilizations. More than a logical or scientific explanation, these approaches were mostly religious or mythical. After Sigmund Freud's Dream Interpretation was published in 1899, the psychoanalysis approach of dreams paved the way to analyse and study dreams in a more critical approach(Freud, 1899). Later, the psychoanalytic approach to dream theory was developed by Carl Jung and his Dream theories(Jung & Hull, 1974). The use of dreams in arts, literature and cinema was analysed using psychoanalysis. From the early days of narrative cinema, filmmakers studied and used psychoanalysis to create dream scenes and the film language of dream scenes. The filmmakers had identified that dreams are a powerful tool to portray the curiosity of the unconscious and human desires. Thus, some filmmakers experimented with dream sequences using creative ways. Therefore, the analysis of dream sequences is based on the psychoanalysis approach and the film language. Three dream sequences from Amour (Haneke, 2013), Shutter Island (Scorsese, 2010), and Hacksaw Ridge (Gibson, 2016) are used in the research for the critical analysis. The use of

dreams in cinema is discussed, and the selected dream sequences are analysed through psychoanalysis and semiotic approaches.

Research Problem

Cinema is one of the most effective and prominent art media for creating dreams or dream-based creations. The filmmaker used different narrative structures, audio-visual techniques, signs and symbols to mould the film language of the dream sequences. Thus, the film language of these dream sequences is significant. The study's research problem states, 'How to Analyse the use of film language in dream sequences?'. The central focus of the study lies in how the signs and symbols in the film language are used and how the relationship between reality and fantasy is portrayed in the dream sequences. The psychoanalytic approach to dream interpretation will be the cornerstone of the analysis of the dream sequences.

Theoretical Approach

The study's theoretical foundation is based on three academic pillars: Film language, Semiotics and Psychoanalysis.

Film language is an audio-visual language that turns the written text (a script) into a cinematic text (a film). The elements of the cinema language consist of narration, cinematography, editing, and mise-en-scene. Film frame, shot, scene and sequence and finally film or cinematic text are the basic structure of the film language(Arijon, 1976). Christian Metz introduced the film language through his semiotic studies. He explained that the film sign has two basic components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical or material features of the sign (such as images and sounds), and the signified is the meaning and expression of the sign. The film language can be defined as a complex system with signs, symbols and meanings(Metz, 1976).

Psychoanalysis is the foundational theoretical approach

pioneered by Sigmund Freud. Through his seminal publications, he explored the intricacies of the human mind, delved into the principles of pleasure and pain, and developed a comprehensive theory of dreams. Through Freud's iconic work interpretation of Dreams, he was able to give a strong scientific explanation for dreams and explain the dream manifestations. According to Freud, dreams are the golden road to the unconscious. The fears and desires inside the unconscious awake during sleep, and they present as signs and visuals. So, the importance of understanding the underlying meanings or text of the dreams through these signs and symbols is one of the key focuses in psychoanalysis(Freud, 1899). Later Carl Jung developed the dream theory by introducing the idea of the collective unconscious and that dreams can reveal universal symbols and archetypes shared across cultures and individuals.(Jung & Hull, 1974).

Literature Review

Dreams and Cinema have a strong connection since they share more common things. Therefore, many studies based on the language of dreams and the language of cinema have discussed the strong connection between dreams and cinema. Academic research based on the analysis of dream sequences and psychoanalysis studies on dream interpretations can be found in the related academic literature. The field of psychoanalysis and dream theory, cinema language, and audience psychology are the main areas of study for the literature review. The previous research and studies based on the dream and cinema can be identified in two main paths. Some research explains the similarity and psychological connection between dreams and cinema, and others explain the use of dreams in cinema.

Interpretation of Dreams by Sigmund Freud is the central study for most of the later research on dream psychology. The groundbreaking theoretical explanation of dreams by Sigmund Freud opened many doors to related academic fields and the theory provided a new explanation of the human psyche.

Later, Interpretation of Dreams delved into the arts, literature, and cinema. Freud explains the definition of dream, two levels of dreams and dream manifestation in his study. According to Sigmund Freud, dreams represent unconscious desires, thoughts, wish fulfilment, and motivations. These elements in the human mind might be unacceptable or impractical therefore they represent the desires, thoughts, wish fulfilment, and motivations through symbolic forms. "The dream is the royal road to the unconscious."(Freud, 1899) Carl Jung developed the dream theory with his explanation of the collective consciousness and compensation theory. According to Carl Jung dreams are natural reactions from the unconsciousness and they have images and symbols. These images, symbols and their meanings are presented through the universal human experiences as they have some common features and similarities (Jung & Hull, 1974).

As mentioned in the above paragraph, film and dream-based studies have two paths. The similarities and the connection between dream images and film images is a study based on dream psychology and audience psychology. Psychologists often compare the similarities of both mediums, and they often denote the similarities of the experiences.

Robert Curry discussed the similarities between the film image and the dream image in his research, Films and Dreams, published in the Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism 1974. He explained both are discontinued illusions and they unfold the experiences of our lives and desires. 'Films do invite comparison with dreams. In general, our dreams simply seem more cinematic than our days. A curious, discontinuous way of unfolding characterizes films and dreams'(Curry, 1974). The experience of watching a film and seeing a dream has a similar kind of feeling. He later discussed some dreams have depth with symbols and meanings like a great movie. "Our dream life is another source of our sense that dreams are like films. For just as some films are truly great works of art, at times our dreams speak with the depth and authority of a work of art" (Curry, 1974).

Rudolf Arnehim developed an idea of the fundamental connection between the dream image and the visual image through Freudian psychoanalysis in the book Visual Thinking. Arnehim explained that dream images are created through the reactions of the unconscious, and film images are created similarly.(Arnheim, 1969).

The other approach of studies related to academic discussion on film and dreams consists of research works that analyse dream scenes and dream-based narratives in cinema. Many research works in this area are critical analyses or content analyses focusing on semiotics and psychological approaches. These studies delve into the use of dream scenes, the cinematography employed in these scenes, and the expression of directors through their portrayal of dream sequences.

'The Dream Screen: An Artistic Analysis of the Representation of Dreams in Cinema' is a research work conducted by Misia Mormina. The research analyses directors' vision and expression through the editing of selected dream sequences from different movies. Mormina's key focus delves into the use of editing in dream sequences and how it is significant compared to the other sequences(Mormina, 2016).

Thorsten Botz-Balstein wrote the most significant research work related to the Dream Sequences. His book Films and Dreams: Tarkovsky, Bergman, Sokurov, Kubrick, and Wong Kar-Wai (2008). He discussed the dreams and the film language of the dream sequences of the above directors. Tarkovsky's anti-realism and dream symbolism, Sokurov's image and Kubrick's and Wong Kar Wai's dream sequences are discussed in the book. Films and Dreams considers the essential link between films and the world of dreams. Discussing dream theory in the context of film studies means moving from the original clinical context within which dream theory was initially developed to an environment established primarily by aesthetic concerns. Botz-Bornstein deals with dreams as 'self-sufficient' phenomena that are interesting not because of their contents but because of the 'dreamtense' through

which they deploy their being. A diverse selection of films is examined in this light: Tarkovsky's anti-realism exploring the domain of the improbable between symbolization, representation and alienation; Sokurov's subversive attacks on the modern image ideology; Arthur Schnitzler's shifting of the familiar to the uncanny and Kubrick's avoidance of this structural model in Eyes Wide Shut; and Wong Kar-Wai's dreamlike panorama of parodied capitalism.(Botz-Bornstein, 2007)

While ample literature is available on analysing film language in various contexts and exploring the psychological connection between cinema and dream, there is a notable research gap in examining film language within dream sequences, especially in movies released after 2000.

Research Methodology

Since the study is based on the analysis of dream sequences, the research is conducted as a content analysis using the qualitative research method. Using content analysis, the film language within these selected dream sequences is examined through a combined approach of semiotics and psychoanalysis. Data collection relies on a comprehensive library survey encompassing online and physical resources, including reading and audio-visual materials.

The purposive sampling method was employed to select the dream sequences based on the objective of the study and the depth of the research problem. Furthermore, the film's dream sequences were selected based on their psychological depth and semiotic usage to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the study's research problem.

The data analysis commenced with an introductory overview and narrative description of the background of three dream sequences. Subsequently, the audiovisual and fundamental elements of these dream sequences were analysed. The process of identifying signs and symbols was then elaborated upon. This

analysis delves into the utilization of film shots, sound design, and narrative structure within the dream sequences. Additionally, it studies the use of signs and symbols, cinematic patterns, and stylistic choices employed throughout the dream sequences. The results and discussion section explored Freudian psychoanalytic concepts within the dream sequences through the identified signs and film language.

Analysis

The study focuses on three dream sequences from the iconic movie Shutter Island.(Scorsese, 2010), Amour (Haneke, 2013) and Hacksaw Ridge (Gibson, 2016)In the analysis, the basic background of the movie and the dream sequence are described with a special focus on its semiotics and film language. Then, the signs and symbols of the sequence and the significance of the film language are identified and analysed. Then, the sequences are discussed using the psychoanalysis approach.

Figure 01

Note. Shutter Island (Scorsese, 2010)

Shutter Island, a cinematic masterpiece directed by veteran director Martin Scorsese, is a psychological thriller that explores the psyche of a troubled US Marshal. The movie's dream sequence holds special significance, and it unveils a different dimension

of the narrative. The protagonist of the film, Teddy, has trouble sleeping. He enters a green-walled house, and he hears a piece of music from a phonograph from the back. Walking toward the sound, he finds his late wife, Dolores. He asks whether she is real or not. He holds her in his hand. The wife is slowly turned into ashes through the illusion of fire and blood. Her body starts to burn, and the blood starts to come out from her heart to his hand. She finally becomes ash and fades. His hand is now filled with water. Finally, Ted wakes up and realises that his hand is filled with water from a leaked pipe on the roof above his bed. The mise-en-scène of the sequence is well crafted. the colour design is a combination of green, yellow and black. The blocking of the sequence is based on Gustav Klimt's painting The Kiss (Klimt, 1908). The sound design is based on the audio played in the scene. Fire becomes a film sign with burning fire as a signifier and the pain as a signified. Blood and water are identified as other signs in the dream sequences.

Figure 02

Note. Amour (Haneke, 2013)

Amour (Haneke, 2013), a film by Michel Haneke, is a nice portrayal of the love and challenges of lonely couples in their older age, and the story gets more intense with the wife suffering from a debilitating stroke. The dream sequence of the Amour(Haneke, 2013) The movie has been constructed more realistically. As the dream scene starts, the husband is brushing

his teeth, and he hears noise from the outside. He goes in that direction to check. He then moves out of the house, and no one is there. Assuming his wife is moving, he calls her name and finds that the floor is filled with water. Shockingly, a hand appears and holds his breath by covering his face. Then he wakes and screams. the hand in the dream appears to be the wife's hand. The sound design of the dream scene is nicely crafted using the dialectical sound, including footsteps, water sounds and dialogue. The water is a film sign (water as the signifier and fear as the signified). The hand is also a film sign and it foreshadows the upcoming incidents of the movie and the inner struggle cum the fear of the husband.

Figure 03

Note. Hacksaw Ridge (Gibson, 2016)

Hacksaw Ridge (Gibson, 2016)It is the extraordinary true story of WWII medic Desmond Doss, played by Andrew Garfield, who, in Okinawa during the bloodiest battle of WWII, miraculously saved 75 men in a matter of hours without firing or carrying a gun. The movie's dream sequence is a brief scene compared to the other two movies. On the battlefield one night, Desmond Doss has to rest in a small pit with his fellow soldiers, and they are discussing their lives. They fall asleep, and suddenly they are surrounded by the Japanese army. The background and sky are lit green because of the heavy artillery. Green light (colour) stands as a film sign which indicates the colour green as the signifier and fear as the signified.

Results and Discussion

First, we open the discussion using the dream-based psychoanalysis approach. We can identify that the dream sequence of Shutter Island is full of visual signs and symbols. The dream's core is based on the feeling of loss and the melancholic memory of the protagonist (loss of the wife). The dream begins with a shot of the protagonist's troubled mind with sleeping difficulties. The psychoanalysis concept of the physical sensors in sleep affecting the dream is visible in the scene as the water drops from the roof influences the blood and the water in the hand of the dream (final shots of the dream when the character wakes from the dream and realises his hands are wet). The mise-en-scène of the dream (colours, painting reference and texture of the design) opens a door to the character's unconscious by emphasizing the psychoanalysis idea that dreams are the golden gates to the unconscious. The fire and ash symbolize the burning pain and the loss. The texture of the fading nature of the dream visual connotes the character's troubled mind. As discussed above, a dream is a combination of reality and fantasy. The dream sequence of Shutter Island is developed with that. The movie's dream sequence explores the character's insight.

The dream sequence of the movie Amour is constructed with realistic visual language and a slow rhythm, which is the style of the movie. The realistic visual language holds a speciality when compared to the other famous dream sequences. The 'fear 'in the unconscious is the central focus of the dream sequence. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, desires and fears are the primary sources of the unconscious, which affects dreams. The silence of the dream sequence is another key feature of film language, which allows the viewer to go inside the character's mind calmly. The element of water once again brings the suspense to the dream sequence. The water on the floor also acts as a sign of the dream, bringing fear and enduring pain in the unconscious. On the other hand, the water symbolizes the unseen motives of the character. The hand that appears in the dream is a sign of death or violence, which foreshadows the death of the wife later

in the movie. The end of the dream scene is created as a shock, which also shocks the character and the audience. The sudden appearance of the hand becomes a shock as the man understands his motives towards his wife. As Freudian psychoanalysis explains, the tragedy of the dreams is that they unveil our hidden motives and desires in the unconscious. In simple terms, they tell you who you are.

The dream sequence of the movie Hacksaw Ridge is a very short scene based on a soldier's dream on the war front. Fear is the central focus of the dream scene, and the colour green becomes a sign and symbol of the dream, bringing out the idea of fear. The dream is constructed as uncertain, as it gives the character and the audience a moment of doubt about reality.

The colours (green and yellow), water, and fire become universal symbols and archetypes in these dream sequences, denoting Carl Jung's theory of dreams. These dream sequences can identify the universal similarities of dreams. The visualization of dreams is always created with a combination of reality and fantasy. The three dream sequences show the employment of the combination of reality and fantasy. The dream is a perfect combination of fantasy and reality, similar to cinema.

Conclusion

This research explored the use of film language within cinematic dream sequences, revealing its complex role in storytelling. By examining film visuals and sound and employing signs and symbols drawn from psychoanalysis, filmmakers can construct intricate dreamscapes. These dreamscapes blur the line between fantasy and reality, illuminating the characters' unconscious desires and fears.

The analysis of three dream sequences from Shutter Island (Scorsese, 2010), Amour (Haneke, 2013), and Hacksaw Ridge(Gibson, 2016) Demonstrated how filmmakers utilized semiotics and psychoanalysis to shape the narrative. Fire, water,

and specific colours emerged as recurring signs across the dream sequences, potentially reflecting universal fears and memories. This study contributes to the ongoing exploration of film language and audience psychology. Further research on dream sequences in contemporary and Sri Lankan Cinema could provide valuable insights into filmmakers' evolving techniques.

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