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Editorial Note

The Sri Lanka Journal of Communication (SLJC) holds the first Sri Lanka media journal , initially published in 1986 by the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Kelaniya. This journal features articles rooted in original research, addressing a diverse range of topics in communication and media studies. Our contributors have explored various dimensions and branches of the discipline, enriching the academic discourse in this field.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Lecturer (Probationary) Dasini Madurasinghe for her tireless and exemplary roles as Associate Editor. Her timely and insightful contributions have been instrumental in making this issue a reality. I am equally indebted to the members of the Review Commitee, whose meticulous reviews and constructive feedback have strengthened every submission.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Head of the Department of Mass Communication, Senior Lecturer Dr. Manoj Pushpakumara Jinadasa and all our department colleagues for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey. Special thanks are also due to Dr. Mangala Keerthi Pasqual and Professor Mangala Katugampola for their remarkable assistance in facilitating the launch of the SLJC Issue II.

I am profoundly grateful to the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Professor M.M. Gunatilake, and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Kelaniya, Senior Professor Nilanthi De Silva, for their steadfast encouragement of this academic endeavour.

Finally, I extend my deepest thanks to all the scholars who submitted manuscripts for consideration in this issue. The continuation of the SLJC is made possible through the active engagement of academics who share their insightful research with us.

Thank you all.

Dr. Aruna Lokuliyana
Chief Editor, Sri Lanka Journal of Communication (SLJC)

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The Department of Mass Communication holds the distinction of being the pioneer in the Sri Lankan higher education system to introduce career-oriented degree programs in Mass Communication, Public Relations, and Media Management. Established in 1973, the Department has a proud history of 52 years, during which it has produced numerous academics, media professionals, and public relations experts who have excelled in both national and international spheres.

The Department offers a diverse range of academic programs, including Bachelor of Arts (General and Honors) degrees, external BA degree programs, and postgraduate qualifications at the levels of Postgraduate Diploma, MA, MSS, MPhil, and PhD. In addition, it conducts specialized diploma courses in Mass Communication and Public Relations to cater to industry-specific needs.

In an era where communication technologies are becoming increasingly pivotal, the Department, supported by a well-qualified academic staff, remains committed to its mission of producing versatile professionals to meet the growing demands of the media and public relations sectors. Through its academic and research contributions, it also plays a vital role in the continued development of these industries.

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Social Media Misinformation, Disinformation and the Online Safety Act in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

With the rise of social media, communication has evolved, and information is now more readily accessible. However, the propagation of false information is one of the major issues brought about by this transition. Disinformation can blur the borders between fact and fiction, sowing seeds of doubt and dissent in even the most reliable sources. It is frequently used as a technique to influence or deceive. Consequently, the issue of news trust has become paramount as discerning truth from falsehood becomes increasingly complex. Sri Lanka has had firsthand experience with the detrimental effects of disinformation and misinformation, particularly during health crises, political turmoil, and social unrest. In response to these issues, the Online Safety Act, which aims to regulate social media platforms to stop the spread of misleading information, was introduced by the government of Sri Lanka in 2024. Accordingly, this research attempts to examine the impact of the Online Safety Act on disinformation on social media in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this research aims to identify the key provisions of the Online Safety Act and assess how the act seeks to combat misinformation on social media. A qualitative content analysis method was employed to analyse the text of the Online Safety Act. This study found that although the Online Safety Act in Sri Lanka is comprehensive in its approach to defining and tackling misinformation, there is a need for safeguards to ensure that measures against misinformation do not infringe on one's freedom of expression.

Keywords: Online Safety Act, Social media, Misinformation and Disinformation, Sri Lanka, Freedom of expression

Introduction to Social Media Misinformation and Disinformation

Social media platforms have taken centre stage in how people share information, communicate, and view the world in the age of digital technology. These platforms have also enabled content creation and distribution by diverse users and easy access to information (Cinelli et al., 2020). However, this has also made it easier for misinformation to spread. In general, rumours, misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation are common challenges confronting media of all types. It is, however, worse in the case of digital media, especially on social media platforms (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022). Misinformation propagated by social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter is referred to as social media misinformation (Li & Chang, 2023) and this phenomenon has profound effects on public opinion, political stability, and trust in society in addition to the impact it has on individual views.

The adverse impacts of social media misinformation are especially evident during times of crisis. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, several incidents related to public health arose from misinformation circulating on these platforms. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube responded by removing misleading coronavirus content that encouraged risky behaviours, such as unproven cures and self-medication (Albrecht et al., 2023). While people turned to social media for updates on government announcements, health precautions, and the latest pandemic news (Adekoya & Fasae, 2022). The widespread misinformation about vaccinations and treatments made it difficult for society to discern accurate information and take appropriate safety measures.

Not all countries are equally affected by the spread of disinformation (Humprecht et al., 2023). For instance, during the COVID-19 period, India faced significant challenges with misinformation (Coe, 2023; Patra & Pandey, 2021). Sri Lanka has also experienced the dangerous impacts of social media

misinformation. In 2018, a wave of anti-Muslim violence was partly fueled by false information spread online (Amarasingam & Rizwie, 2020). Similarly, after the Easter Sunday Attacks in April 2019, widespread misinformation prompted the Sri Lankan government to impose an island-wide Internet ban. However, the availability of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and ineffective enforcement allowed continued access to misinformation, demonstrating that bans alone are not sufficient to control the flow of information (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2024).

Inaccurate or misleading information falls under the broad category of misinformation (Vraga & Bode, 2020). Fake or false news and false information are generic terms that are applied to either or both disinformation and misinformation, which is also less commonly identified as 'mal information' (Coe, 2023). On the one hand, misinformation can be defined as when false information is shared without intentional harm. On the other hand, disinformation is when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm. Mal-information, on the other hand, can be defined as when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often private information into the public sphere (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation have significant impacts on society and democracy. The widespread circulation of false or misleading information erodes public trust in democratic institutions and processes, making citizens more sensitive to manipulation and division (Sanchez et al., 2022). A large majority of people across many countries trust that social media and the internet have made it easier to influence public opinion with rumours and falsehoods, and many see the spread of this information as a significant threat (Wike et al., 2022). Misinformation and disinformation create serious risks to Sri Lanka by fueling social divisions, undermining trust in democratic processes, and inciting violence, especially during sensitive periods such as elections or national crises.

Literature Review

In recent years, there has been a rise in legislative attempts to counter the spread of disinformation around the world. These attempts by national governments include the formation of task groups (for monitoring and supervising the spread of misinformation) and taking more restrictive approaches to denounce the spread of misleading information as illegal and punishable by law (Schuldt, 2021). For instance, scholars offer insights into the dynamics of popular support for regulating misinformation and highlight the importance of addressing the potential harm of disinformation to gain support for enacting regulatory action (Freiling et al., 2023). This viewpoint is, therefore, essential for creating potent laws that are both accepted by the public and efficiently battling false information on social media.

Current trends in global legislation indicate how countries worldwide are introducing new laws to minimise the spread of misinformation on social media and other digital channels. For example, Malaysia introduced laws to counter online misinformation and disinformation in 2018. Singapore parliament passed the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act in 2019, and Thailand refined the Computer Crime Act in 2017 (Schuldt, 2021). However, critics argue that these laws have been misused by their respective governments to monitor and eliminate any political dissent and suppress the freedom of expression of the public and the media, eroding Southeast Asia's already weakened democratic institutions and structures (Carson & Fallon, 2021). These legal measures have contributed to a climate of self-censorship, as individuals and media organizations fear punitive action for expressing dissenting views or reporting on sensitive topics. The cumulative effect is a shrinking civic space and weakening democratic norms, as governments prioritise control over information at the expense of open, pluralistic discourse. As a result, while these laws aim to protect the public from misinformation, their practical impact has

often been to undermine press freedom, restrict civil society, and consolidate state authority over digital spaces.

Accordingly, a more prudent approach to enacting legislation against disinformation on social media platforms is needed to implement policies that empower users to make truthful determinations for themselves (Nuñez, 2020). Singapore and Malaysia have put several legislative frameworks and policies in place to reduce false information on social media. The Protection against Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), passed in Singapore in 2019, gives the government the authority to send correction warnings to people and websites that spread misleading material, requiring them to post the corrections. The government also supports media literacy programs to teach the public about false information and to foster critical thinking.

Although legislative measures were intended to solve a pressing issue worldwide, the democratic governments' solutions to misinformation, in many cases, have gravely compromised the public's right to free speech (Lim & Bradshaw, 2023). Policies, when worded vaguely and beyond the scope of disinformation, create loopholes that make political and legal obfuscation possible. This then communicates ambiguous restrictions and penalties, rendering free speech and the right to criticise conditional. Furthermore, anti-misinformation legislation can be abused to suppress political criticism and strengthen governmental authority, which is contrary to democratic principles (Cunliffe-Jones, 2021).For instance, claims that people's right to free speech is violated by a disproportionate number of replies to misinformation from African governments. These policies usually involve broad, ambiguous restrictions that could stifle free expression and restrict media freedom.

The government of Sri Lanka proposed an online safety measure in 2023; civil society and others have critiqued the Bill, with 54 petitions filed in the Supreme Court arguing that the Bill violated the fundamental rights of citizens contained within the Constitution and could only be passed by a referendum

(The Online Safety Bill: A Trojan Horse, 2024) The bill is a comprehensive regulatory framework comprising over eight parts and fifty-seven provisions covering several areas. These cover the creation and the authority of the Online Safety Commission, the proscription of specific factual assertions in the online sphere, the actions taken to counter these proscribed remarks, and various additional clauses. However, several provisions of the online safety bill and the possibility of these provisions impacting fundamental freedoms and human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and information, are cause for concern. The clauses about the creation, appointment, and duties of an Online Safety Commission and other experts, the ambiguous and overbroad definition of actions that qualify as crimes, and the excessively harsh penalties are of special concern when examining the Online Safety Bill (Online Safety bill 2023, Sri Lanka).

In addition to other unspecified matters, the Bill would establish an "Online Safety Commission" whose duties would include "prohibiting online communication of certain statements of fact, preventing the use of online accounts and inauthentic online accounts for prohibited purposes, making provisions to identify and declare online locations used for prohibited purposes in Sri Lanka and to suppress the financing and other support of communication of false statements."

The right to freedom of speech and expression is guaranteed by Article 14(1)(a) of the Constitution, free from government censorship or persecution. Further, the right to freedom of expression and opinion is upheld by Article 19 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, of which Sri Lanka is a signatory. This fundamental right is, therefore, essential for upholding democratic ideals and encouraging candid communication within the nation. The freedom of expression and opinion may be restricted, but only if permitted by law and required for one of a select few acceptable reasons, such as preserving others' rights and reputation, national security, public order, public health, or morals as stated by the provisions in

Article 19(3) of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.

As stated in Articles 15(2) and 15 (7) of the Sri Lankan Constitution,

> **15(2) The exercise and operation of the fundamental right declared and recognised by Article 14(1)(a) shall be subject to such restrictions as may be prescribed by law in the interests of racial and religious harmony or about parliamentary privilege, contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.**
>
> **15(7) The exercise and operation of all the fundamental rights declared and recognised by Articles 12, 13(1), 13(2) and 14 shall be subject to such restrictions as may be prescribed by law in the interests of national security, public order and the protection of public health or morality, or for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others, or of meeting the just requirements of the general welfare of a democratic society. For this paragraph, "law" includes regulations made under the law for the time being relating to public security.**
>
> (Constitution of Sri Lanka)

The Online Safety Act 2024 of Sri Lanka sought to regulate online communication by addressing several significant issues. This statute aims to prevent the unauthorised use of genuine and counterfeit goods for criminal operations, protect victims of cyberbullying, harassment or stalking, and identify and expose websites used for illegal activity. Hence, the Act establishes protocols for content regulation and ensures public safety by enforcing legal compliance by users and online companies. However, this Act is also subject to much scrutiny over its

effectiveness due to ambiguity and limitations in the statute's provisions. Therefore, this research focuses on the Online Safety Act in Sri Lanka, which examines how it affects misinformation and disinformation on Sri Lankan social media. Therefore, this study aims to determine the Online Safety Act's principal elements and evaluate its effectiveness in preventing false information on social media.

Methodology

This research examines the possible impacts of the Online Safety Act on disinformation shared on social media in Sri Lanka. The primary objective is to identify and analyse the main clauses of the Act, paying particular attention to its dealings with transparency, enforcement procedures, and content regulation.

Content analysis has a long history of use in communication, journalism, sociology, psychology, and business. And content analysis is being used with increasing frequency by a growing array of researchers (Neuendorf, 2017). This is because content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). Content analysis is grounded in an objectivist epistemology and systematically analyses textual, visual, or audio data, objectively identifying patterns and themes. This approach ensures the identification of measurable trends while maintaining consistency and replicability in data analysis.

This study conducts a thorough content analysis of the Act's approach to countering misinformation, particularly emphasising its definitions, application, and controls over misinformation. Furthermore, the study will evaluate the responsibilities imposed on social media platforms by the legislation, such as their oversight, moderation, and reporting of offensive material. By exploring these areas in depth, this research seeks to facilitate better comprehension of the strategy used by the Act for

countering the dissemination of false information and guaranteeing safety online.

This study was desk research, and qualitative content analysis was used as the primary research method to analyse the text of the Online Safety Act. Regarding misinformation and disinformation, I analysed the "PROHIBITION OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION OF FALSE STATEMENTS" section of the Online Safety Act. This was particularly necessary to examine the rules of the Act governing the regulation of online content, especially misinformation and disinformation. During this process, essential sections of the Act that defined false information, described enforcement protocols and detailed the scope of duties and responsibilities of social media platforms were identified. This research attempted to evaluate how well the Act addressed the issues of digital misinformation while establishing standards to ensure compliance by online organisations via a methodical classification and interpretation of the sections. This method was, therefore, implicit in assessing the Act's possible effects on social media usage and the larger digital landscape.

Discussion

Sri Lanka's Online Safety Act, introduced in 2024, encompasses several key provisions to regulate online content and combat misinformation. It mandates that social media platforms monitor, flag, and remove harmful content, with specific guidelines for filtering and algorithms. Platforms must implement measures for due diligence, such as fact-checking and user reporting, and maintain transparency about their content management practices. Enforcement mechanisms of the Act include penalties and fines for non-compliance and establishing regulatory bodies to oversee the Act's implementation. Additionally, the Act promotes public awareness and educates on identifying and reporting misinformation while providing mechanisms for appealing decisions and resolving disputes related to content moderation.

Section 3 of the Act of Sri Lanka discusses the aim and objective of this act.

> **"1. To protect persons against harm caused by communication of prohibited statements online.**
>
> **2. To ensure protection from communication of statements in contempt of court or prejudicial to the maintenance of the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.**
>
> **3. To introduce measures to detect, prevent and safeguard against the misuse of online accounts and bots to commit offences under this Act; and**
>
> **4. To prevent the financing, promotion and other support of online locations which repeatedly communicate prohibited statements in Sri Lanka, by way of online account or through an online location**". (Sentence 3, Online Safety Act 2024)

Accordingly, a 'false statement' "is defined as a statement that is known or believed by its maker to be incorrect or untrue and is made especially with the intent to deceive or mislead but does not include a caution, an opinion or imputation made in good faith" (Online Safety Act, No 09 of 2024, P 51)

This definition thus suggests that a false statement is not simply inaccurate information. However, rather, it is distinguished from sincere mistakes or subjective opinions by the intentional intent to deceive others. A clear framework for dealing with misinformation on social media is provided by the concept of a "false statement," which is made to deceive and is known or believed by its originator to be untrue. This concept highlights the significance of intent, enabling platforms to recognise and mark content that is intended to deceive users. Social media firms can

create standards that safeguard free speech and counteract harmful misinformation by differentiating between false statements, valid viewpoints, or good-faith expressions.

Section 11(j) of the Act indicates that websites providing social media platforms to the end users in Sri Lanka should be registered by the Commission in such manner as may be specified by rules made under this Act (Section 11, Online Safety Act).

Prohibition Sections 12 through 20 of the Act list the offences regarding the prohibition of online communication of false statements. According to Section 12, any individual who endangers public health, national security, or public order or who incites hatred between various groups by making false claims, wherever they may be, will be found to be in violation of the law. If found guilty, the accused will face punishment as decreed by the penal code. The purpose of this clause is to combat the dissemination of false information that may compromise public safety and harmony in society. As stated in Sections 13 to 20 of the Act, other offenses include communication of false statement amounting to contempt, wanton provocation by giving false statements to cause a riot, disturbing a religious assembly by a false statement, deliberate and malicious communication of false statements to provoke religious feelings, online cheating, circulating false reports with intent to cause mutiny or an offence against the state, and communicating statements to cause harassment

Sentence	Offence	Punishment
12	Prohibition of communication of false statements in Sri Lanka	imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years or to a fine not exceeding five hundred thousand rupees or to both such imprisonment and fine

13	Communication of false statements amounting to contempt	
14	Wantonly giving provocation by a false statement to cause a riot	imprisonment of either description for a term not exceeding five years, or to a fine not exceeding five hundred thousand rupees or to both such imprisonment and fine
15	Disturbing a religious assembly with a false statement	imprisonment of either description for a term not exceeding three years, or to a fine not exceeding three hundred thousand rupees, or to both such imprisonment and fine
16	Deliberate and malicious communication of false statements to outrage religious feelings	liable to imprisonment of either description for a term not exceeding three years, or to a fine not exceeding three hundred thousand rupees, or both such imprisonment and fine.
17	Online cheating	Liable to imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years or to a fine not exceeding seven hundred thousand rupees or to both such imprisonment and fine

18	Online cheating by personation	liable to imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years or to a fine not exceeding three hundred thousand rupees or to both such imprisonment and fine
19	Circulating false reports intending to cause mutiny or an offence against the State, & c.	liable to imprisonment of either description for a term not exceeding seven years, or to a fine not exceeding seven hundred thousand rupees, or to both such imprisonment and fine.
20	Communicating statements to cause harassment & c	liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years or to a fine not exceeding five hundred thousand rupees. In the event of a second or subsequent conviction, such term of imprisonment or fine or both such imprisonment and fine may be doubled.

Online Safety Act section 12-20

In addition, Section 18 of the Act states that maintaining counterfeit online accounts is an offence punishable by imprisonment. Thus, the Online Safety Act would give an 'Online Safety Commission' extensive authority to decide what a "prohibited statement" qualifies as, advise internet service providers to remove such content, and disable access for those who are considered violators.

The Online Safety Act has given the recently formed Online Safety Commission broad authority, enabling it to define and control what "prohibited statements" are. This clause is important because it gives the Commission power over a broad spectrum of potentially hazardous or damaging content. The Commission can proactively address content that it feels poses hazards to public order, national security, or health by using its jurisdiction to classify specific remarks as illegal. This covers destructive information and remarks that could incite animosity or malice between various social groupings, thus dividing society.

The Act expressly forbids disseminating "false statements" that could spark unrest or disrupt authorised assemblies, especially those connected to religious worship or ceremonies. This section emphasises how important the Act is for preserving peace and order in public spaces, particularly in varied societies where different populations cohabitate. The Commission seeks to reduce the dangers connected with the dissemination of false narratives that have the potential to incite violence or prejudice by focusing on disinformation that jeopardises public safety and confidence.

Moreover, the Online Safety Commission's recommendations to internet service providers to delete such unlawful information and deny access to violators highlight a proactive approach to content filtering. To hold platforms responsible for the content shared on their websites may entail putting stricter regulations in place for content monitoring and filtering. The definitions of prohibited utterances are vulnerable to interpretation and prone to subjectivity, which raises worries about potential overreach and censorship given the extensive scope of the Commission's powers.

This might have a chilling effect on free expression since people would self-censor out of fear of reprisals or the consequences of breaking the Act. The delicate balance between defending individual liberties and preserving national interests will require close supervision to avoid abuse of the Commission's authority. All things considered, the Online Safety Act aims to make the Internet a safer place, but it also calls for continuing discussion about the consequences of the right to free speech and the defence of democratic principles in the digital age.

Further, in accordance with section 21, any person who, by way of an online account or through an online location, commits child abuse and publishes any photograph, audio or video of an abusive or pornographic nature relating to a child commits an offence. It shall, on conviction, be liable to imprisonment (section 21, Online Safety Act 2024).

The Commission is empowered to notify an internet intermediary to terminate counterfeit online accounts and coordinate fake behaviour. According to the act, an internet intermediary is "essential internet services that enable users to interact with digital material. It comprises services that provide users access to third-party content, deliver said content to users, and show search results that direct users to content located on other servers. It also describes platforms that link advertisers and content creators to enable discussion about paid content. This thorough foundation is essential for comprehending how online services function in content access, transmission, and promotion. This understanding will help shape laws to maintain online safety and accountability (Online Safety Act P.51,52).

The right to freedom of expression has been permanently severely restricted and threatened in Sri Lanka (Tissainayagam, 2012). Restrictive regulations, censorship, and unstable political environments have frequently hampered its citizens' free expression of ideas. The government has occasionally used laws and regulations to silence dissident voices and manipulate media narratives, which can be detrimental to democratic processes and human rights ("Freedom House: New Report - The Global Decline in Democracy Has Accelerated," 2021).

It can thus be interpreted that requiring social media platforms to be registered could threaten the right to free speech. A directive such as this would result in more government monitoring of internet activity, which might be used to monitor and stifle opposing viewpoints. Consequently, platforms might be pressured to impose more stringent content regulations, discouraging critical discourse and various opinions. Requiring the Online Safety Act's registration requirements for social media platforms may seriously jeopardise the freedom of speech. This mandate

might result in more government surveillance of internet activity, creating a climate in which opposing viewpoints are rigorously examined. Platforms may unintentionally stifle critical conversation when they feel pressure to impose harsher content rules to comply with government demands. Fearing negative consequences, users would self-censor their thoughts, homogenising the content and suppressing the voices of different viewpoints. Even while improving safety is the goal, these actions risk weakening the open communication vital to a robust democracy.

Conclusion

This research finds that Sri Lanka's Online Safety Act could be a significant lever for social media platforms to impose content regulations, potentially controlling critical discourse and undermining users' rights to free expression. The Act's provisions may warn users that their online activities are under continuous observation, which could stop open expression and foster self-censorship. Also, the requirements for registering social media platforms with the Commission may pose financial and logistical obstacles.

Monitoring online activities also raises privacy concerns. Personal information collected during the registration process could be exposed to misuse. While regulation is necessary to address challenges such as spreading misinformation and harmful content, these efforts must be balanced to protect fundamental human rights.

The definition of a "false statement" in this act seeks to address online misinformation and harmful content, but the criteria are overly broad. Critics contend that such definitions could lead to overreach, resulting in legitimate opinions or dissenting views being misclassified as punishable falsehoods. This engenders a risk that free expression and public debate could be curtailed under the pretext of internet safety. To ensure the legislation effectively targets genuine misinformation without infringing on free speech or democratic discourse, it is vital to establish clear and precise definitions. Safeguards are necessary to prevent

legislative measures from unduly restricting citizens' freedom of expression.

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Digital Content Marketing (DCM) and E-Brand Loyalty (EBL) in the Non-Bank Finance Sector of Sri Lanka: A Conceptual Review

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Abstract

The study begins by emphasizing the importance of DCM in building connections, trust, and brand engagement. It highlights the empirical views on content marketing but underscores its role as a comprehensive skill set. As per empirical studies, the influence of DCM has been tested and claimed for further studies in relation to brand related behavior in both online and offline contexts. As per some studies found in Sri Lankan context, research gaps have been highlighted for the said scope with reference to different product scopes and market contexts. However, conceptualizing the variables and their interrelationships referring to DCM and its sub contents has been found as a timely needed requirements for empirical studies since research gaps require alternative bases to frame comprehensive studies. This research explores the theoretical foundations of DCM, incorporating concepts such as hedonic and utilitarian values and the uses and gratifications theory, which explains factors affecting consumer demand for media content. Paper explains the literature review and the variable connectivity between DCM, hedonic and utilitarian values, and E-Brand Loyalty. In addition, this study mainly highlights the importance of investigating the DCM for financial sector services in Sri Lanka whilst specific attention is made on Non-banking financial sector (NBFC) depending on its practice related significance,

In conclusion, paper provides an empirical discussion to direct future studies to conceptualize the variables and their connectivity addressing to both empirical gaps and practice gaps found in different marker scopes.

Keywords: *Digital Content Marketing, E-Brand Loyalty, Hedonic and Utilitarian Value Non-Bank Finance and Leasing Sector, and Social Media Marketing*.

Introduction

Traditional marketing communication has given way to emerging digital marketing communication (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004). Digital Content Marketing(DCM) has been considered a pivotal element of digital marketing communication (Rowley, 2008) because it is an affordable pull marketing strategy that helps businesses interact with various consumers and improve marketing performance by building strong relationships between consumers and brands (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). As there is no clear definition of content marketing, according to the Content Marketing Institute, "Content marketing is more than a marketing strategy that uses content to attract an audience. Content marketing is also a full-on skill set. It is no longer enough to market with content (Judge, 2020). According to the Content Marketing Institute, 43 per cent of marketers familiar with firm expenditures believe their budgets for B2B (business-to-business) content marketing will be higher in 2021. Moreover, two-thirds of these groups anticipated budget increases in 2022 (One out of every five people believes growth will be more significant than 9 %) (Stahl, 2021). A seminal study (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019) conceptualized DCM as a very effective strategy for building connections, trust, and brand engagement. Therefore, social media marketing has become one of the essential digital marketing tools today (Felix et al., 2017; Koay et al., 2021).

The inefficiency in digital marketing is evident, with 26% of the allocated budget reportedly going to waste (Schindler, 2022).

While content is often hailed as "king," as famously stated by Bill Gates, 83% of marketers still face challenges in creating and managing content that can be swiftly deployed across digital platforms (Athey, 2022). Reflecting the growing significance of digital advertising, LinkedIn has reported a 43% year-on-year increase in revenue, driven largely by its digital advertising initiatives (Cohen, 2022). Overall, global content marketing is estimated to be on the rise.

Digital literacy in Sri Lanka has seen a significant rise in recent years, as highlighted in a study conducted by the Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (APIDM, 2022). The study specifically focuses on the non-bank finance and leasing sector (NBFS), which held total assets amounting to Rs. 1,611.2 billion by the end of 2022—representing approximately 5% of the total assets in Sri Lanka's financial industry. In contrast, the banking sector accounted for 62% of the industry's asset base, totaling Rs. 19,416.6 billion. The NBFS, comprising 37 finance companies, recorded a growth rate of 6.2% in 2022 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2023).

Therefore, examining how firms can attract new business and repeat purchases is essential for building customer loyalty through emerging social media channels. We have been suggested to understand the emerging online channels (Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2021). As there have not been insufficient studies done in the Sri Lankan context (Ferdinando & Yatigammana, 2021; Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019), particularly in the non-bank and finance sectors. In the context of DCM, attitudinal and behavioural consequences are yet to be mapped (Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2021). Given the significant research gaps in this area, this study will investigate the relationship of DCM with E-Brand Loyalty among immerging social media platforms.

DCM is defined as "an inbound marketing technique that is perceived to be a useful tool for achieving and sustaining trusted brand status, and is affected through a web page, social media,

and value-add content." (Holliman & Rowley, 2014) DCM was once related to digital goods that might be marketed to consumers (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004). The business sector has undergone a significant cultural shift since the advent of the internet. People increasingly turn to online purchasing (Quan et al., 2020). Developing E-Brand Loyalty significantly impacts marketing management in e-space (Gommans.M, 2001). The firm can achieve a competitive advantage by creating insightful social media content (Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019; X. et al. et al., 2019). The article aims to fill a gap in the debate about how well firm-triggered DCM content strategies work at increasing consumer-generated content (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Shen, 2021). Although social media interactions between consumers and brands have grown significantly, there is still much to learn about creating engaged and profitable consumers (Barger et al., 2016). This article examines how the relationship between Digital Content Marketing (DCM) and E-Brand Loyalty is affected by the type of product being marketed (search vs. experience) and the format of the DCM content. By doing this, the article provides a more nuanced understanding of DCM that considers the contextual factors that have been promoted but need to be adequately studied.

In this pilot study, we initially separate DCM from conventional advertising to justify the concept of DCM. After that, research hypotheses will be developed. The research method and summary of findings will be presented together with the discussion, results, and theoretical implications, and the avenues for future research will be outlined.

Literature Review

Digital Content Marketing

Content marketing goes back to over 100 years, beginning in 1981. (Baltes, 2015). The Content Marketing Institute has come up with many definitions from content experts. A recent report states, "content is everything. It is all around us all the time. It is the

water of business" (Rose, 2022). Customers seek accurate and practical information in this information-driven era to assist them in making decisions(An Kee, A W., & Yazdanifard, 2015). Digital content is a bit-based object delivered through electronic channels (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004). Therefore, content marketing comes into play in a pivotal role. Content marketing consists of building and telling stories, as every organisation or individual generates and shares with everyone worldwide (Gupta & Nimkar, 2020). As stated by Wang & Chan-Olmsted (2020), Content marketing has helped to build the organisation's brand among their so-called customers. Most companies use content marketing to identify the limitations of traditional marketing as a communication strategy and to take advantage of the emerging trends and benefits of digital marketing (Baltes, 2015; Wimalasena & Jayasinghe, 2025).

DCM is a pull-marketing strategy that uses digital platforms to produce and spread quality content pertinent to customers' needs to increase brand engagement and foster relationships based on trust, loyalty, and equity (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Traditional advertising and DCM share some similarities but have some key differences. However, unlike traditional advertising, which directly seeks to increase sales, DCM indirectly increases sales through improved customer engagement, trust, and relationships. DCM strives to improve consumer-brand perceptions in a way that ultimately leads to product purchases (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019)

Additionally, customers freely seek out DCM and decide when to consume it, unlike traditional advertising, which disrupts consumers' activities. DCM varies from conventional advertising, which deals with a rented audience, in that it gains its audience by providing consumers with something of value. Lastly, the effectiveness of Digital Content Marketing (DCM) can be readily measured through metrics such as views, clicks, shares, comments, and overall consumer engagement—unlike traditional advertising, where evaluating performance is significantly more

complex (Kim et al., 2021). The two extremes of marketing strategies are push and pull. Social media DCM that is neither very "pushy" nor overly "pully" can be found somewhere between these two extremes. In this report(Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2021), We conceptualize DCM, a type of social media content. Such content is a component of DCM because it only focuses on remotely disseminating worthwhile information that attracts customers to the brand. Push advertising's use of qualities to showcase products is a trait of both pull marketing and push advertising. The benefit of our strategy stems from the idea that mixing several content methods produces synergistic results (Weiger et al., 2018).

According to Forbes, "Digital content is king, across all terms" (Abadi, 2019) and defined again as content marketing is when brands share beneficial information with customers without directly selling to them" (Muthoni & Council, 2021) According to an analysis done by Technavio analysis, $412 worth of industry was projected. (McCoy, 2019). In a seminal article, Hollebeek Macky (2019) conceptualized DCM as a very effective strategy for building connections, trust, and brand engagement. Despite this expanding corpus of academic research, DCM's attitudinal and behavioural effects have not yet been fully mapped. Although businesses can gain a competitive edge by disseminating relevant and helpful content via social media platforms(W. et al. et al. 2019:Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019)

Previous research shows that as customers learn more about a company via social media, they form an emotional bond regardless of whether they are exposed to functional or hedonic information. It declares that Hedonic consumption represents the delight and pleasure customers expect from buying. As each consumer's anticipation of shopping differs, so does the feeling experienced when shopping. Various motivating factors influence some consumers to derive delight and pleasure from purchasing. In a similar vein (Bakırtaş & Divanoğlu, 2013), Various pieces of data point to the fact that consumers have varied expectations for the utilitarian and hedonistic aspects of products (Chernev, 2004)

Theoretical Background

The uses and gratifications theory (Ruggiero, 2000) provides a sound theoretical framework for elucidating the factors that influence consumer demand for media content. The U&G, additionally known as an "approach" (Calder et al., 2009) or a "perspective" (see Hollebeek & Macky, 2019), has previously been used to explain how online experiences and social media material stimulate engagement behaviours (Calder et al., 2009; Dolan et al., 2016), as well as what encourages customers to engage with DCM messages (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). The core premise of U&G is the gratifications that individuals seek to inform their craving for various media. The fundamental tenet of the U&G is that individuals' desires for multiple media are influenced by the gratifications they seek, and they seek added interactivity to the U&G since new media platforms like social media encourage user-to-user dialogue.

The "particular forms or dimensions of satisfaction indicated by audience members of daytime radio programs" are referred to as "gratifications" from the U&G perspective (Dolan et al., 2016, p. 262). In light of this, we define gratifications as the numerous types of happiness consumers have due to social media DCM. The literature contains many gratifications that affect how people use social media. (Calder et al., 2009; Dolan et al., 2016; McQuail, 1983) However, the characteristics of the U&G mentioned in the present literature the most frequently are amusement and informativeness. Those two aspects of the U&G correspond to hedonic and utilitarian values (Batra & Ahtola, 1991). The current study adheres to categorising content consumption motives as utilitarian or hedonic to eliminate duplications that are not logically parsimonious.

Hedonic Value and Utilitarian Value

Hedonic value is defined (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) as being "more subjective and personal than its utilitarian counterpart and

resulting more from fun and playfulness than from task completion" (Babin et al., 1994). Further, it also highlights the possibility of hedonic and utilitarian values coexisting in a single purchasing experience. Hedonistic values are defined by pleasure, amusement, and enjoyment, while utilitarian values are determined by real-world applications and customer demands(Babin et al., 1994). When shopping online, consumers may be looking for practical benefits, such as ease of use and a good outcome, or for emotional benefits, such as enjoying the online shopping experience. Online buyers can derive utilitarian and hedonic value from different aspects of flow, with certain parts providing more hedonic value and others more utilitarian value (Senecal et al., 2002). In line with Sénécal et al., we propose that. In contrast, hedonic aspects of flow may promote Internet use but not online shopping; utilitarian aspects of flow directly impact purchasing. According to more recent studies, such functional factors no longer exclusively influence online purchasing; as e-shoppers gain experience, they increasingly look for hedonic value online (Bridges & Florsheim, 2008; Wasantha, & Gunawardane, 2021). The suggested framework (see Figure 1) postulates that consuming a product's superior hedonic advantages causes more positive feelings, such as excitement and joy, to be promoted (Chitturi et al., 2008). Customers are aware of their buying habits and preferences based on the hedonic and utilitarian qualities of products and their lifestyles. Customers who understand their hedonistic tendencies gain psychological experiences from using the goods and delight and joy from owning them; customers who appreciate their utilitarian preferences are more focused on the product's objective and functional qualities (Bakırtaş & Divanoğlu, 2013). Consuming better practical advantages increases feelings of security and assurance during prevention. The post-consumption assessments of delight and contentment, which increase recommendations and repurchase intentions, are primarily influenced by these promotion and prevention emotions (Chitturi et al., 2008).

E-Brand Loyalty

According to (Copeland 1923, as cited in Gremler D.D, 1995 p.3), customer loyalty has been a hot topic since 1923. In his research, he called "brand insistence" is where it all began. Customer loyalty study, frequently referred to as brand loyalty in the marketing literature, primarily focuses on the commitment people exhibit for tangible objects. IGI Publisher 2020 defines "Repeated satisfaction of a customer with purchases of products or services from a specific e-commerce Website. The persistent purchasing behaviour that is demonstrated over time and is motivated by a positive attitude about the subject is known as loyalty. Keller 1993 The brand can be considered an influential tool and asset in marketing (Bandara et al., 2011). Brand loyalty is one of the core dimensions of brand equity as it directly affects the customer relationship (Aaker,1996; Cooray & Dissanayake, 2022). Brand Loyalty is how people express their loyalty to the brand, which brings numerous benefits to the organization, such as financial and non-financial benefits; e-brand Loyalty is essential as it affects the repurchasing of organizational products or services. Social media marketing has become one of today's most powerful marketing tools. The plan is to conduct activities related to the organization's products and services (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). Debates of loyalty are typically outlined in the bigger and stronger body of literature (Qi & Fu, 2011). Brand loyalty is a concept that neither of the parties to the relationship owns. Consequently, a marketer cannot develop brand loyalty through an organization's actions alone or create or generate loyal customers (June et al., 2000; Bandara & Dissanayake, 2021). The given multidimensional construct of brand loyalty by Oliver (1999) is "a firmly held commitment to regularly repurchase or patronize a favored good or service in the future, leading to repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational factors and marketing initiatives having the ability to lead to switching behaviour". Brand loyalty has been expanded to the online world and given the new name of loyalty thanks to the development of

the internet and related technologies (Quan et al., 2020; Thundeniya, & Dissanayake, 2024). e-loyalty is the extension of traditional brand loyalty to online customer behaviour. Although the theoretical underpinnings of conventional brand loyalty and the recently established phenomenon of e-loyalty are primarily comparable, they have unique characteristics in Internet-based marketing and consumer behaviour. As discussed in the paper published by Harvard University, e-loyalty is all about excellent customer service, prompt delivery, eye-catching product demonstrations, practical and affordable shipping and handling, and transparent and reliable privacy rules (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000). For example, Anderson & Srinivasan (2003) defined E-Loyalty as a customer's positive perception of an online business that results in frequent purchasing behaviour. According to studies by Cyr (2008), e-loyalty is the commitment to regularly visit a brand's website to shop there rather than visiting any other websites (Ferdinando & Yatigammana, 2021; Wasantha, 2025). Accordingly, more work must be put into establishing brand awareness and trust before E-Loyalty can be formed. (Gommans.M, 2001). Gremler (1995) proposed that attitudinal and behavioural dimensions must be considered to measure loyalty accurately. E-loyalty is, therefore, defined for the sake of the current research as the customer's favourable attitude toward an electronic firm that results in recurring purchasing behaviour.

Discussion for Conceptualization and Implications

Previous studies have shown that utilitarian and hedonic characteristics positively relate to attitude (Mariani et al., 2019). Further, it demonstrated that delighting customers improves word of mouth, and e-word of mouth improves repurchasing due to customer loyalty, as satisfaction and loyalty are hedonic benefits (Chitturi et al., 2008). It illustrates how e-satisfaction plays a mediation function by increasing the importance of all the impacts. This demonstrates how hedonic and utilitarian shopping principles affect an online shopper's e-loyalty (Al et al., 2022).

Alongside, this paper suggests hypothesizing the influence of digital content marketing towards e-brand loyalty whilst examining the influential roles of its sub dimensions of hedonic values and utilitarian values for the same (Doghan & Albarq, 2022; Quan et al., 2020). In addition, it proposes to exmaine the e-brand loyalty adressinhg to its oprational measuremeets explained by diferent authors as a single cnstruct followed by acceptable statistical rationale and methodolgical verifications since some studies still ague the validity and relaibility of the measures used for E-brand loyalty.

This paper higlghlights the speciall application of invetigating the DCM for finacial sector whilst mainly highlting its immidiate implication for non-banking finacial sector (NBFC) due to cometitive nature of the segment (Jayampathi and Dissanayake, 2018). Most of the NBFC firms in Sri Lanka applies DCM but the marketing return on invetment (MROI) still finds questionable due to practical issues of strategic fit beween the brand and its target audinace. Some times, managerial issues are found in planning digital campignes for financial services when iy targetes diferent sets of customers featured with widely scattered digital behavipurs. Thus, the real combinations to be used for a digital content is a valid practical issues for NBFC since online behvaioiral responses are dificualt to invetigate. Therefore, it is sugested to extend studies for this sector and evaluate the role of hedonic and utilitarian contents of DCM to direst the industry realted pracises.

Conclusion

In line with the purpose of this study, the empirical overview of Digital Content Marketing (DCM) and its subcomponents was examined through the lens of behavioral theories and variables associated with digital consumer behavior. This has helped establish the theoretical foundation for DCM and clarify how its mechanisms relate to observable behaviors such as e-brand loyalty. Future research across various product sectors and

consumer segments may benefit from exploring the proposed conceptual model, particularly by testing indirect relationships involving mediating and moderating variables. For example, consumer demographic factors could be examined as moderators to assess how the relationship between DCM and e-brand loyalty differs across product categories. This paper primarily advocates for investigating the proposed variable pathways within the non-bank financial company (NBFC) sector, considering existing knowledge gaps and prevalent managerial challenges. Nevertheless, it is recommended that future studies also extend to other practically exposed sectors, given the current lack of research on the effectiveness of DCM from both financial and non-financial perspectives.

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Role of Emotional Intelligence in Enhancing Business Communication

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Abstract

This concept paper underscores the pivotal role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in enhancing business communication within contemporary organizational settings. It begins by highlighting the multifaceted nature of business communication, emphasizing its reliance on understanding interpersonal dynamics, emotions, and social cues. While traditional studies have focused on the technical aspects of communication, recent empirical and theoretical advancements position EI as a comprehensive skill set essential for effective interaction in the workplace. Drawing on foundational theories by Mayer and Salovey (1990) and Goleman (1995), the paper reviews the influence of EI on key business functions such as teamwork, leadership, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Empirical studies are referenced to demonstrate how emotional awareness, regulation, and empathetic communication contribute to organizational effectiveness and improved workplace relationships. Special attention is given to the practical implications of EI, including its impact on leadership communication and conflict management. In conclusion, the paper provides a critical discussion on the need for further empirical research to conceptualize and measure the interrelationships between EI and business communication, addressing both theoretical gaps and practical challenges in diverse organizational contexts.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Business Communication, Interpersonal Relationships, Leadership, Conflict Management, Organizational Effectiveness*

Introduction

In the contemporary business environment, communication is widely recognized as a fundamental pillar that supports organizational effectiveness, collaboration, and leadership (Igbokwe, 2024). The ability to communicate effectively within and outside an organization shape not only the flow of information but also the quality of relationships, decision-making processes, and overall workplace culture (Bucata & Rizescu, 2017). Business communication extends far beyond the mere transmission of information; it encompasses the ability to understand and manage interpersonal dynamics, emotions, and social cues that influence interactions (Ishikawa, 2025). As organizations become increasingly complex, global, and technology-driven, communication has evolved into a multidisciplinary field of study that examines the diverse types of texts, verbal and non-verbal communication methods, and digital platforms used by individuals within business organizations to interact both internally and with external parties (Fuoli & Lutzky, 2025). This comprehensive perspective acknowledges that effective communication is not only about what is said but also how it is said, when it is said, and the emotional context in which it occurs.

Within this evolving landscape, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical factor in enhancing communication processes within organizations (Baporikar, 2020). Emotional Intelligence is broadly defined as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and others (Anand et al., 2023). It involves a set of emotional competencies including emotional awareness, emotional reasoning, emotional management, and emotional communication. These competencies enable individuals to navigate the complex social environments of the workplace by recognizing their own emotional states and those of others, managing emotional responses constructively, and communicating with empathy and clarity (Dogru, 2022; O'Connor et al., 2019). The integration of EI into business communication reflects a shift from purely cognitive and technical skills toward a more holistic approach that values emotional and social

capabilities as key drivers of effective interaction (Emmanuel, 2023).

The concept of Emotional Intelligence gained academic prominence through the pioneering work of Mayer and Salovey (1990), who conceptualized EI as a distinct form of intelligence that complements traditional cognitive intelligence. They described EI as the capacity to process emotional information accurately and efficiently to guide thinking and behavior. This foundational framework was later popularized and expanded by Daniel Goleman (1995), whose influential work emphasized the relevance of EI to workplace success and leadership effectiveness. Goleman argued that emotional competencies such as empathy, emotional self-regulation, and social skills are essential for clear, persuasive, and empathetic communication. He highlighted that individual with high EI are better equipped to manage interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts, and motivate themselves and others, all of which are critical in business settings where teamwork, leadership, negotiation, and conflict resolution are routine (Babatunde et al., 2023).

Empirical research has consistently supported the importance of EI in enhancing communication effectiveness and organizational outcomes. Studies indicate that emotionally intelligent employees tend to exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance, partly because they can better manage stress, build trust, and foster positive workplace relationships. For instance, Babatunde et al. (2023) found that EI significantly improves communication effectiveness by enabling individuals to express themselves clearly, listen actively, and respond empathetically to others' needs and concerns. This leads to reduced misunderstandings, fewer conflicts, and more collaborative problem-solving. Moreover, emotionally intelligent leaders are more adept at inspiring and influencing their teams, creating a culture of openness and psychological safety where employees feel valued and heard (Maldanado et al., 2023).

Despite these advances, many organizations still underutilize the potential of EI in their communication strategies and leadership development programs (Pramila, 2024). Traditional business

communication models have often prioritized clarity, message structure, and persuasive techniques, sometimes neglecting the emotional and relational dimensions that influence how messages are received and acted upon. This oversight can lead to communication breakdowns, emotional disconnects, and unresolved conflicts that undermine organizational effectiveness. For instance, a message that is factually accurate but delivered without emotional sensitivity may fail to engage employees or may even provoke resistance. Conversely, communication that integrates emotional awareness and empathy can enhance message acceptance and foster stronger interpersonal bonds.

The growing complexity of modern workplaces—with diverse teams, virtual communication channels, and heightened stress levels—further underscores the need to integrate EI into business communication (Davaei, 2022). Digital communication platforms such as emails, video conferences, and social media often lack the rich emotional cues present in face-to-face interactions, making emotional intelligence even more critical for interpreting tone, intent, and underlying feelings. Employees and leaders with high EI are better able to compensate for these limitations by using verbal and non-verbal signals effectively, adapting their communication style, and managing emotional responses in digital contexts (Audrin,2024).

This concept paper explores the role of Emotional Intelligence in enhancing business communication by examining its theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, and practical applications within organizational contexts. It aims to highlight how emotional competencies contribute to improved interpersonal relationships, conflict management, and leadership communication, thereby fostering a more productive and harmonious workplace (Babatunde, 2023). By synthesizing multidisciplinary perspectives from psychology, organizational behavior, and communication studies, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of how EI can be leveraged to address common communication challenges and improve organizational outcomes.

Furthermore, the paper addresses existing research gaps by emphasizing the need for more empirical studies that investigate

the dynamic interplay between emotional intelligence and various forms of business communication, including internal communication, and leadership messaging. It also discusses practical strategies for developing EI skills among employees and leaders, such as training programs, coaching, and organizational culture initiatives that promote emotional awareness and regulation.

As businesses face increasing pressures to innovate, collaborate, and compete in a global marketplace, the integration of EI into communication practices emerge as a strategic imperative (Silva et al., 2024). Organizations that cultivate emotionally intelligent communicators are better positioned to build trust, resolve conflicts, inspire teams, and create resilient cultures that adapt effectively to change (Attah et al., 2024). This paper contributes to the ongoing discourse by providing a theoretical and practical framework for understanding and applying EI in business communication, ultimately supporting sustainable organizational success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this literature review is to systematically examine and synthesize existing scholarly research on the relationship between EI and business communication effectiveness in contemporary organizational contexts. Specifically, the paper explores the theoretical frameworks that conceptualize EI and its components relevant to workplace communication. It analyzes empirical evidence demonstrating how EI influences interpersonal communication, leadership communication, conflict management, and team dynamics. Additionally, the review highlights research gaps and proposes directions for future studies to deepen the understanding and practical integration of EI in organizational communication practices. By providing an integrated perspective, the paper aims to inform scholars, practitioners, and organizational leaders about the critical role of EI in fostering effective, empathetic, and adaptive business communication that supports collaboration, trust, and overall organizational performance.

Methodology

This paper employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to gather, analyze, and synthesize both theoretical and empirical studies on Emotional Intelligence (EI) and business communication. The review process involved identifying relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers through academic databases such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate, using keywords related to EI and various aspects of communication. The selection criteria included studies that addressed EI within workplace or organizational communication, offered empirical evidence or strong conceptual frameworks, and were published in reputable academic sources, while excluding those lacking scholarly rigor or organizational relevance. Data extracted from the selected literature encompassed study objectives, research contexts, methodologies, findings, and limitations. A thematic analysis organized the findings into key themes including theoretical models of EI, its role in communication effectiveness, leadership and team interactions, digital communication, and conflict management. The final synthesis critically evaluated the literature to highlight recurring patterns, theoretical consistencies, and research gaps, drawing from multiple disciplines to offer a comprehensive and coherent understanding of EI's contribution to enhancing business communication. This approach ensures a transparent, systematic, and replicable review, providing a strong basis for future research and practice.

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical construct in understanding and improving business communication, leadership effectiveness, and overall organizational performance (Sofia, 2020). As organizations navigate increasingly complex and dynamic environments, the ability to manage emotions both one's own and those of others has become essential for effective interpersonal interactions (Landry, 2019). This study explores the

theoretical foundations of EI, its relationship with communication effectiveness, leadership, conflict management, and the challenges posed by digital communication, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of EI's role in enhancing business communication.

Theoretical Foundations of Emotional Intelligence

The concept of Emotional Intelligence was first formally introduced by Mayer and Salovey (1990), who defined it as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions to facilitate thinking and behavior. Their ability-based model identifies four key branches: perceiving emotions accurately, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotional meanings, and managing emotions effectively. This model laid the groundwork for viewing EI as a form of intelligence complementary to traditional cognitive intelligence.

Daniel Goleman (1995) popularized EI by broadening the concept beyond ability to include a wider range of emotional and social competencies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Goleman emphasized that these competencies are crucial for workplace success, particularly in leadership roles, where emotional awareness and regulation directly impact communication and decision-making. Bar-On (1997) further contributed by conceptualizing EI as a set of interrelated emotional and social skills that enable individuals to cope with environmental demands and pressures, including interpersonal relationships and stress management.

These foundational models collectively underscore that EI is not simply about recognizing emotions but involves complex processes that facilitate effective interpersonal communication, social interaction, and adaptive behavior. Mayer et al. (2004) assert that individuals with high EI tend to be more socially adept, empathetic, and capable of regulating their emotions, which enhances their ability to communicate effectively and build strong relationships in business environments.

Emotional Intelligence and Communication Effectiveness

Business communication is a multifaceted process that involves not only the exchange of information but also the management of emotional and social dynamics that influence how messages are sent, received, and interpreted (Violanti, 2017). Bar-On (2002) described emotionally intelligent individuals as those who understand and express themselves well, relate effectively to others, and cope successfully with daily pressures. These emotional competencies directly contribute to communication effectiveness by enabling individuals to accurately perceive others' emotions, express their own feelings appropriately, and respond with empathy and clarity.

Empirical studies provide robust evidence supporting the positive impact of EI on communication outcomes. Francis (2017) demonstrated that managers and employees with higher EI levels exhibit superior communication skills, which foster trust, reduce misunderstandings, and promote collaboration within organizations. Goleman (2001) emphasized that emotional attunement such as recognizing tone, facial expressions, and body language plays a crucial role in interpreting underlying emotions and intentions, thus enhancing interpersonal understanding and reducing conflict. Furthermore, Revina and Davydova (2018) highlighted that individuals with strong emotional regulation skills maintain professionalism and constructive dialogue even in high-pressure or conflict situations, which is essential for sustaining effective communication.

The ability to manage one's emotions during communication also influences message delivery and reception (Kakarla, 2025). For example, emotionally intelligent communicators can tailor their messages to the emotional states of their audience, increasing message relevance and persuasiveness. This dynamic is particularly important in negotiations, customer interactions, and leadership communication, where emotional cues often dictate outcomes.

Emotional Intelligence in Leadership and Team Communication

Leadership communication is an area where the influence of EI is especially profound. Emotionally intelligent leaders possess the ability to inspire, motivate, and influence their teams by demonstrating empathy, managing their own emotions, and responding effectively to others' emotional needs (Babatunde et al., 2023). Studies by Cote and Miners (2006) and Wong and Law (2002) have shown that leaders with high EI foster positive work climates, enhance team cohesion, and improve overall organizational performance.

At the team level, Druskat and Wolff (2001) introduced the concept of group EI, which refers to the collective emotional competencies that regulate the emotional states of team members and promote a supportive communication environment. Teams with high group EI exhibit greater emotional resilience, adaptability, and openness in communication, which are essential for navigating the complexities of modern business challenges (Momm et al., 2014). This collective emotional competence not only improves interpersonal relationships within teams but also contributes to a positive organizational culture that supports innovation and collaboration.

Moreover, emotionally intelligent leadership facilitates better conflict management, promotes psychological safety, and encourages open dialogue, all of which are critical for team effectiveness (Peter,2025). Leaders who model emotional intelligence set the tone for communication norms, influencing how team members express emotions and resolve disagreements constructively.

Emotional Intelligence and Digital Business Communication

The rise of digital communication platforms such as emails, video conferencing, and social media has transformed the way business interactions occur, often limiting the availability of traditional emotional cues like facial expressions, tone of voice, and body

language. This shift has heightened the importance of EI in interpreting subtle emotional signals and managing online interactions effectively (Fuoli & Lutzky, 2025).

Emotionally intelligent communicators are better equipped to adapt their messages for digital media, maintain empathy, and manage potential misunderstandings in virtual environments. Tuncdogan et al. (2017) emphasize that EI facilitates emotional regulation and social awareness in digital communication, helping individuals maintain professionalism and positive relationships despite the challenges posed by remote and asynchronous communication channels. As organizations increasingly adopt hybrid and virtual work models, integrating EI into digital communication training is becoming essential for sustaining engagement, trust, and collaboration (Karve, 2025).

In addition, the absence of physical presence in digital communication requires heightened emotional sensitivity and self-regulation to avoid misinterpretations and conflicts. Emotionally intelligent employees and leaders can use verbal cues, timing, and message framing strategically to convey empathy and build rapport in virtual settings (Maldanado, 2023).

Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management in Business Communication

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of business communication, arising from differences in opinions, goals, and interpersonal dynamics. Emotional Intelligence plays a pivotal role in conflict management by enabling individuals to recognize emotional triggers, regulate their responses, and engage in constructive dialogue (Revina & Davydova, 2018). Individuals with high EI are more likely to adopt collaborative conflict resolution strategies, focusing on problem-solving rather than confrontation.

Moreover, EI fosters empathy and perspective-taking, which reduce emotional escalation and promote mutually beneficial outcomes. This capacity to manage emotions constructively during conflicts is critical for sustaining long-term business relationships and organizational harmony (Francis, 2017). By

understanding and addressing the emotional undercurrents of disputes, emotionally intelligent communicators can de-escalate tensions and facilitate effective negotiation and reconciliation.

Discussion for Conceptualization and Implications

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a significant role in enhancing communication effectiveness in organizational settings (Babatunde et al., 2023; Goleman, 1995). Emotional competencies such as emotional awareness, regulation, and empathy positively influence interpersonal interactions, leading to improved collaboration, conflict resolution, and leadership communication (Dogru, 2022; O'Connor et al., 2019). This paper conceptualizes EI as a multidimensional construct that directly impacts business communication outcomes by fostering emotional understanding and adaptive responses in complex social environments.

Moreover, the literature suggests that EI contributes to both individual and collective communication processes. For instance, emotionally intelligent leaders create environments that encourage open dialogue and trust, which in turn enhances team cohesion and organizational climate (Côté & Miners, 2006; Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Wasantha,2025). This highlights the mediating role of leadership communication in translating EI competencies into positive organizational behaviors and outcomes.

This study further proposes examining the moderating effects of contextual factors such as organizational culture, communication channels (face-to-face vs. digital), and cultural diversity on the relationship between EI and communication effectiveness (Fuoli & Lutzky, 2025; Tuncdogan et al., 2017). Given the growing prevalence of virtual work environments, understanding how EI facilitates emotional regulation and social awareness in digital communication is especially pertinent. For example, emotionally intelligent communicators may better manage the challenges of reduced emotional cues in virtual settings, thereby sustaining engagement and reducing misunderstandings (Pittis et al.,2012).

In practical terms, organizations face challenges in systematically developing and integrating EI skills within their communication frameworks. While many recognize the value of EI, there remains a gap in translating this into effective training programs and leadership development initiatives that address real-world communication complexities (Revina & Davydova, 2018). This paper underscores the need for empirical studies that explore how EI-based interventions can improve communication outcomes across different organizational levels and sectors.

Finally, this paper highlights the importance of tailoring EI development to specific business contexts, such as multicultural teams or high-stress industries, where emotional dynamics are particularly complex. Future research should investigate how EI interacts with other competencies, including cultural intelligence and technological literacy, to enhance communication effectiveness in diverse and evolving business landscapes.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

While the positive relationship between Emotional Intelligence and business communication effectiveness is well-supported, several research gaps remain (Jorfe et al., 2014). Most existing studies focus on individual-level EI, with limited exploration of how EI operates at team and organizational levels in diverse cultural and industry contexts (Momm et al., 2014). Additionally, the impact of EI on digital and cross-cultural communication requires further empirical investigation, especially given the increasing globalization and virtual nature of modern business. Future research should also explore the development and measurement of EI competencies specifically tailored to business communication contexts, including training interventions that enhance emotional skills among employees and leaders. Understanding how EI interacts with other communication variables such as language proficiency, cultural intelligence, and technological literacy will provide a more holistic view of communication effectiveness in organizations.

This study integrates key theoretical perspectives and empirical findings on Emotional Intelligence's role in business

communication, aligned with the abstract and introduction. It provides a comprehensive foundation for further empirical studies and practical applications aimed at enhancing communication effectiveness through emotional competencies. This study has explored the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence supporting the role of Emotional Intelligence in enhancing business communication. By synthesizing multidisciplinary perspectives, it has established EI as a critical driver of effective interpersonal relationships, conflict management, and leadership communication within organizations. The conceptualization of EI as a multifaceted skill set provides a robust framework for understanding how emotional competencies influence communication processes and organizational outcomes.

Furthermore, future research is encouraged to empirically test the proposed relationships, particularly focusing on the moderating and mediating effects of organizational culture, communication channels, and demographic variables. Investigating these factors across various industries and cultural contexts will deepen understanding of EI's nuanced role in business communication.

Practically, this paper advocates for the integration of EI development into organizational communication strategies and leadership training programs. Such initiatives can foster more empathetic, adaptive, and effective communicators, thereby enhancing collaboration, reducing conflict, and improving overall organizational performance. Additionally, communications take place in the digital context should be revisited to examine how it does influence interpersonal and large group communication. Whilst there are professionally embedded digital contents

used in digital platforms, some content manipulations are also found in the real world, thus, their outcomes should be carefully examined by the future research studies. In conclusion, as businesses continue to navigate increasingly complex and digitalized environments, Emotional Intelligence emerges as an indispensable competency for sustaining productive and harmonious communication. This study lays the groundwork for future empirical inquiries and practical applications that leverage EI to drive communication excellence and organizational success.

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Collective Memory and Mindful Communication

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the intersection of mindfulness and collective memory within the field of Asian communication studies, emphasizing the importance of grounding research in indigenous philosophical and cultural contexts. While dominant media and communication theories have largely originated in the West, shaped by European and American socio-historical conditions, they are often applied uncritically across global contexts, including Asia. This practice risks overlooking the deep-rooted intellectual traditions of the region, which are informed by Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist worldviews.

The paper explores how Buddhist principles, particularly the concept of right mindfulness (Samma sati) from the Noble Eightfold Path, can inform communication practices and research. It further unpacks the term Satipatthana (foundations of mindfulness) to argue for a more nuanced and ethical model of "mindful communication." Parallel to this, the study analyzes the role of collective memory in shaping group identity and historical understanding, especially in Asian contexts where memory is often socially constructed, negotiated, and influenced by religious, political, and media institutions.

Through a critical, decolonial lens, the paper advocates for a contextual re-evaluation of Western media theories when applied in Asia. Rather than rejecting Western frameworks outright, it proposes an approach that integrates local epistemologies to foster more inclusive and culturally relevant scholarship. In doing so, it challenges the prevailing academic tendency among Asian scholars to seek validation from Western paradigms, urging instead a balanced, reflexive, and situated approach to media and communication theory.

Keywords: Asian communication, mindfulness, collective memory, media theory, decolonial approach

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore wrote that life's memories are not history, but the work of an unseen artist (The Hindu, 2023). He believed that trying to get precise history from memory was fruitless, but that looking over the memories was fascinating (The Hindu, 2023).

Lord Buddha's teachings, with a particular emphasis on S*ati* (mindfulness), can be meaningfully connected to both personal and collective memory. While he did not explicitly formulate a theory of collective memory in the modern sense, his teachings consistently underscore the significance of remembering and reflecting on past experiences and the *Dhamma* themselves.

Personal memory and collective memory are integral parts of our lives. While memories can endure over long periods, they are also subject to change or gradual fading. These transformations can occur due to various factors, including media influence, social changes, and cultural shifts. Luis Bunuel (1985:4-5) pointed out in his book "My Last Sigh" "*life without memory is no life at all, just as intelligence without the possibility of expression is not really an intelligence. Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feelings, even our actions. Without it, we are nothing*."

Collective memory is a sociological concept with psychological presumptions (Prager, 2001). It is not easy to provide a clear definition of collective definition (Schuh, 2 024). The term ' collective memory can be defined as "shared meaning a group of people gives the past" (Edy, 2016). Collective memory refers to the memories individuals hold as members of specific groups, and belonging to these groups can profoundly influence a person's sense of identity (Roediger, 2021). "*Memory and the way we remember, forget, and recall events, people, places, and so on, have been a very sophisticated topic of theoretical research for a long time*" (Ebbinghaus-1885 as cited in Oxford Internet Institute, 2025).

Research on collective memory is highly interdisciplinary and studied in at least in five major academic discipline namely, communication, sociology, psychology, history and anthropology (Edy, 2016). In today's

world media plays a remarkable role in making and maintaining of collective memory.

Literature Review

Collective memory studies have gained popularity over the past decade. This concept views memory as a shared attribute of groups, cultures, or societies rather than just individuals. Ineke Wessel and Michelle L. Moulds (2008:288-304) characterize collective memory as "*lying on a continuum from individual expressions of memory at one end to remnants of past events at a group (or even cultural) level at the other".*

Collective memory encompasses images, beliefs, judgments, knowledge, and evaluations of the past that are widely distributed within society (Wessel and Moulds, 2008). Sociologist Durkheim has put forward the concept of *"collective jubilation"(Li,2018)*. He believes that tribal members can express creativity when they come together during celebrations, dances, and holiday gatherings (Li,2018).

The term collective memory was developed by "*Maurice Hawlbachs* (Prager, 2001) as ' a social reconstruction of the past in the light of the present' (Hawlbachs as cited in Zhong, Nekmat, & Chen, 2020). Halbwachs and scholars in the collective memory tradition argue that memory is not limited to individuals but is also shared and maintained by groups or communities (Prager, 2001).

After Halbwachs, different scholars from various academic disciplines have used the concept of collective memory as an interdisciplinary concept (García-Gavilanes et al. 2017).

Mass media has become an integral part of our lives. It plays a significant role in shaping our collective memory and, at times, even influences or manipulates it.

"*It is for precisely the reason that we must understand media and mediation as a kind of switchboard at work between the*

individual and the collective dimension of remembering. Personal memories can only gain social relevance through media representation and distribution" (Erll,2011:113). Alongside traditional media, users of social media engage in the collective construction and revision of narratives to sustain the remembrance of past crises (Zhang, Nekmat, & Chen, 2020).

Most studies focus on explicit collective memories. However, beyond this visible domain lies a vast, hidden realm of implicit collective memory, which requires more systematic research, including in the field of communication anthropology (Erll, 2022).

Implicit collective memory is widespread and influential, yet challenging to trace (Erll, 2022). "*The collective memory literature contains several different phenomena and theories, and one may use a variety of dimensions to summarize it*" (Wessel & Moulds, 2008:288 304). More recently, memory study scholars tend to stress the significance of the media in shaping collective memories (García-Gavilanes *et al.*, 2017;1-7). "Research on the construction of memory has also inspired studies on the fictious nature of memory. Some studies have discovered that memory permits us to flexibly reassemble different components of encoded traces, representing past events that may or may not have happened, as mental simulations to construct futures" (Han, 2023: 1-10). The significance of memory mediation first emerged in the scientific field of the 1950s, as the rapidly developing discipline of cognitive science directly influenced memory research during this period (Han, 2023). "*Mediated memory research history has transitioned from a mere subdiscipline of cognitive science, cultural studies, and sociological studies to an autonomous field of research*" (Han, 2023;1-10). *Researchers of social memory are primarily concerned with how group processes affect memory* (Wessel and Moulds ,2008:288 304). "*Neurological -cognitive science research suggests that memory is represented through technology, particularly in neuroimaging techniques. Conversely, humanities and social science research highlight memory's cultural representation through digital*

media, such as television, computers, smartphones, the internet, and social media (Han, 2023:1-13). Moliner and Bovina's (2019:1-11) research suggests that the study of commemorative monuments could provide privileged access to the collective memories of certain past events. "*Within the domain of communication studies, the delineation between "new" and "old" media by researchers has stirred debates among mediated memory researchers on whether corresponding methodological innovations should be implemented*" (Han, 20231-10). "*Ai's evolution has drastically reshaped our relationship with collective memory. Large ai models, like gpt and dall·E, have emerged as memory agents, assimilating vast cultural and historical data across centuries. Unlike traditional digital repositories, these tools employ an analogical approach, capturing the complexity of human memory. Their potential to weave together fragmented pieces of the past offers new ways to delve into historical and cultural data*" (*Schuh,2024.231-255).* As Carlson (2010:235-250) pointed out that *"Collective memory, as distinct from individualized memories or authoritative history, involves both a shared emphasis on particular past events and a shared way of interpreting these events among a group. Collective memories provide narratives that order the past while contributing to a shared identity for groups in the present. Given its importance, the ability to speak authoritatively about the past is always limited to a small group of speakers"* (Carlson, 2010:235-250).

To destroy memory means to dispossess an individual or a group of their main tool for giving sense to their present, just because human beings need to extract, from their past, the necessary answers for understanding their current state and acting in the building of their future.

Collective memory is typically unique to a specific generation and, to some extent, a particular country, as each nation has its own cataclysmic historical events (Mustafa *et al*., 2022); it refers to a community's understanding of its shared past, though collective

memories may be somewhat superficial, as some individuals might not have experienced the event directly (Mustafa *et al*., 2022). Feminist media theorists argue that access to mass media is a key factor in shaping cultural narratives (Harp, Grimm, & Loke, 2018) and power dynamics. Media not only reflects societal values but also plays a significant role in shaping them. The need to conceptualize the full extent of time's impact on memory has recently garnered the attention of scholars in memory studies (Zelizer, 2022). Political scientists have emphasized the functional role of memory in shaping communities, demonstrating how its malleability can be leveraged to achieve specific objectives (Cordonnier *et al*.,2 022).

Discussion and conclusion

Both psychology and the social sciences provide critical perspectives for comprehending collective memory, and interdisciplinary collaboration between these fields is vital for furthering our understanding (Hirst & Manier, 2008).

The influence of mass media, including social media platforms, is now inseparable from our everyday existence. In the digital era, human memory and media shared an inseparable and deeply connected relationship (Han2023). It is also one of the ways of socialization process today. Sometimes, the media create a pseudo environment. We probably fail to understand reality and embrace the mediated reality instead. Media do not merely reflect reality; rather, they construct representations of the past (Erll, 2011).

'*Conversely, the individual only gains access to socially shared knowledge and images of the past through communication and media reception (internalization')'*(Erll, 2011:114). Given the intrinsic connection between memory and media, it is unsurprising that the study of cultural memory frequently overlaps with media research (Erll,2011). Media plays a vital role in shaping and sustaining cultural memory. As Erll (2011:113) aptly notes, 'Cultural memory is unthinkable without media'.

Media not only preserve historical memory but also store, recreate, and sometimes produce their own narratives of history for the collective memory of particular groups. Media depictions are merely creations, shaped by the decisions and involvement of numerous individuals in the media industry, as well as by technology. Thus, collective memory based on media is not real, yet we perceive it as reality. Collective memory is strongly influenced by the media (Mustafa *et. al.*, 2022).

"Media are not simply neutral carriers of information about the past. What they appear to encode – versions of past events and persons, cultural values and norms, concepts of collective identity – they are in fact first creating. In addition, specific modes of remembering are closely linked to available media technologies (Erll,2011:114). The ability of media to shape perceptions of reality has been a central theme in media theory since its inception (Erll,2011).

Engaging with media—whether by watching television, listening to the radio, or browsing online content—subjects individuals to a constant stream of messages that construct representations of the world. Media not only shape perceptions of reality but can also lead audiences to conflate mediated representations with objective reality. However, individuals interpret and understand these messages differently, depending on various factors such as their educational background, the amount of time spent consuming media, peer influence, and broader social contexts.

A strong connection exists between the production of collective memory and journalistic practice (Bosh, 2019). Collective memory can be impacted by the displacement of communities from one area to another. For example, the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River led to the displacement of over 41,000 families across Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. Similarly, the Mahaweli Development Project in Sri Lanka also resulted in the relocation of numerous communities. There are indeed clear instances of large-scale violence, genocide, ethnic cleansing, internment, and human rights violations that are comparable in terms of their scale, scope, and impact on collective memory.

"*Our shared memory of the September 11,2001 and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami highlighted the cardinal importance of media especially television and print media, in shaping public memory of the past*" (Mustafa et al., 2022: 235-256). The memory work that occurs in journalism has much to teach us about the relationship of memory to mind and media (Zelizer, 2022). Memory cannot be conceived without the presence of media (Erll, 2011), and the role of media is essential for memory, functioning on both individual and collective levels" (Erll, 2011).

Research on collective memory within media studies offers valuable insights into the ways media producers and journalists construct narratives and contribute to the shaping of social reality (Harp, Grimm and Loke, 2018).

Journalism potentially contributes to memory studies by enhancing our understanding of how memory influences and interacts with the individuals and communities that engage with it (Zelizer, 2022).

The production of collective memory is closely connected to journalistic practice, grounded in the idea that journalists create the first drafts of history by incorporating the past into their reporting (Bosh, 2019). The practice of journalism is a key agent of memory work, as it serves as one of society's main mechanisms for recording and remembering, and in doing so, helps shape collective memory (Bosh, 2019). Media use various techniques to make their messages believable and accessible to the audience. There exists a deep and inseparable bond between human memory and media (Han, 2023).

'However, development in digital technologies in recent years has significantly influenced how we keep track of events both as individuals and as a collective. Digital technologies have also provided us with huge amount of data, which researchers are already using to study different aspect of our social behaviour utilizing automatic procedures on much larger samples of data' (García-Gavilanes et al., 2017:1-7). According to Schuh (2024), different memory media, such as books, libraries, and archives,

play a crucial role in facilitating the broad transmission of traces and practices, shaping shared knowledge structures, values, and habits within a community.

Although research has predominantly focused on explicit collective memory, it is equally important to direct attention toward the exploration of implicit collective memory (Erll, 2022).

Like other social sciences, communication research is Westernized. As Shelton Gunaratne (2010:473-500) pointed out "*non-Western scholars have failed to produce outstanding theories or methods to supersede the center nations' grip on the field*". "*Asian, as well as African and Latin American scholars have clearly recognized the problem of Eurocentrism in social science although they have not become renowned for developing original non-Western social theories'* (Gunaratne, 2010:473-500).

As Syed Hussein Alatas (2000:23–45) pointed out, "In addition to political, social, and economic imperialism, we are also subjected to intellectual imperialism. Intellectual imperialism is the domination of one person by another in their world of thinking. Intellectual imperialism· is usually an effect of actual direct imperialism or is an effect of indirect domination arising from imperialism".

Asian human sciences, largely grounded in Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist philosophies, raise the question of whether contemporary Asian communication scholars possess a deep understanding of these traditions (Senaviratne, 2018).

Sayed Hussen Alatas (*2010:171) further mentioned that "the call for alternative discourses in Asian social sciences suggests that the social sciences take place in a social and historical context and must be relevant in this context. One way to achieve relevance is to develop original concepts and theories based on the philosophical traditions and popular discourses of these societies. Any claim to universality must respect the extent of the differences between Asian and non-Asian societies and admit that in some instances distinct theoretical backgrounds are required*".

It is important to study media and collective memory from an Asian perspective, as each country has its own unique cultural, social, political, traditional, and philosophical foundations. Research should be conducted with these contexts in mind. In this regard, insights can be drawn from Western research and theories, not to reject them, but to create a balance between Eastern and Western perspectives. In recent decades, the expansion of mass communication departments and schools throughout Asia has prompted growing scholarly debate regarding the adaptation and de-westernization of communication theory within the region's academic institutions (Senaviratne, 2018). It should be called "balancing" rather than "de-westernization" (Senaviratne,2018:10).

Expanding the field of communication studies necessitates incorporating diverse non-Western perspectives, with Asian approaches offering particularly valuable contributions to this endeavor (Dissanayake, 2003).

Media messages have a direct impact on the collective memory of audiences. When creating media content, it is essential to consider its influence on the audience. Today, media has evolved into a vast and largely profit-driven industry. One of its covert effects is the manipulation of mass consciousness, aiming to reshape individual and group values to influence behavior and control activities.

Communication should be approached with mindfulness. Mindfulness means seeing things as they truly are. This perspective should be applied across religious, philosophical, cultural, social, and economic contexts.

Mindfulness has become a buzz word today. There are four foundations of mindfulness, contemplation of the body, of feeling, contemplation of mind and contemplation of phenomena. In Buddhism, mindfulness is known as "*Vipassana*," which means "*to see things as they really are*." *Vipassana*, or mindfulness, is a method of self-transformation through self-observation. Developing mindfulness (*Vipassana*) is central to Buddhist teachings.

Mindful communication can be introduced as one of the Asian approaches for addressing contemporary issues. Gunaratne, Pearson,

and Senarath (2015:5) espouse a "*mindful journalism" path based on Buddhist principles to overcome negativity and bias. "The aim of mindful journalism is not profit making"; "but truthful reporting without institutional restraints that might be clarity of the trained journalist's mind*".

Gunaratne, Pearson, and Senarath (2015:18) explained the theory of Mindful Journalism based on the Buddhist Four Noble truths thus: "*Mindful Journalism requires the journalists to understand the reasons for sorrow/unhappiness, and to desist from using his/her craft to increase desire (tanha) and clinging (upadana). We extracted these principles from the first and second truths. The mindful journalist must distinguish between pleasure and happiness to understand the reality that cycle existence (samsara) means suffering (dukkha) that one can avoid only by attaining Nibbana or enlightenment. Pleasure is physical and short-lived whereas happiness is mental and long-lasting. The mindful journalist must not mislead the people that lasting happiness is attainable without purifying their minds from defilements. Enlightenment means eradication of all fetters -the mental state of supreme bliss or Nibbana. S/he should understand the reasons for the existence of unhappiness (dukkha) and desist from using journalism of knowingly promote attachment (upadana) and desire (tanha)*".

Mindful communication plays a crucial role in shaping collective memory with awareness and clarity. It enables individuals to perceive things as they truly are and understand the shared memories formed within the groups they belong to, whether small or large. In this regard, it is essential for a communicator to embody the qualities of a *Kalyāṇamitta*—an eternal friend, a spiritual guide, and a compassionate companion. A true *Kalyāṇamitta* supports the cultivation and development of the Noble Eightfold Paths, fostering wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline for the well-being of all.

Future research on collective memory can be explored from multiple perspectives, as various disciplines have thus far primarily advanced within their own distinct approaches (Cordonnier *et al.,* 2022). The

present phase of interdisciplinary research emphasizes the merging of paradigms from different fields (Han, 2023) and next challenge will be to utilize this integration to create distinct theories and research methods tailored to the study of mediated memory (Han, 2023).

As Dissanayake (2003:17-38) pointed out "*Communication is a fast-expanding field and nowhere is this more apparent than in the area of mass communication studies. If Asian theories of communication are to attract greater and greater attention of communication scholars, it is of the utmost importance that we relate Asian concepts and approaches to the realities of mass communication*".

It is essential to explore and critically engage with the indigenous epistemologies and intellectual traditions of Asia in order to develop theoretical frameworks and conceptual models that are grounded in the region's unique socio-cultural and historical contexts. Undertaking authentic, context-specific research is vital for the creation of knowledge that genuinely reflects Asian realities and perspectives. This scholarly endeavor should not be misconstrued as an attempt to promote Asia-centrism or merely as a reactionary effort toward the de-Westernization of communication theories. Rather, it represents a constructive and inclusive approach to diversifying the global knowledge landscape and enriching the field of communication studies through a multiplicity of voices and experiences.

In Sri Lanka, there is a significant lack of comprehensive communication research. Many policy decisions are formulated without the support of rigorous, locally grounded scientific studies. Instead, policymakers often rely on research findings from other countries—particularly from Western contexts—which may not accurately reflect the realities on the ground in Sri Lanka. These externally derived insights, while potentially valuable in their original settings, often fail to account for the unique socio-cultural, economic, philosophical, and political dimensions that shape Sri Lankan society.

Therefore, it is crucial to foster and prioritize indigenous communication research that is rooted in the local context. Developing a robust body of knowledge based on the lived experiences, traditions, and dynamics of Sri Lanka will not only enhance the relevance and effectiveness of policy interventions but also contribute to the creation of a more autonomous and self-sustaining intellectual framework. Such an approach will empower decision-makers with context-specific evidence, ensuring that policies are more responsive, inclusive, and aligned with the nation's development goals.

Disclosure Statement

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Queer Bonds and Rural Masculinities in Postwar Sri Lanka: Heteronormativity, Homophobia, and Digital Homosocial Desire

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Abstract

This paper investigates how rural young men in Sri Lanka cultivate same-sex relationships within a sociocultural landscape shaped by heteronormativity, homophobia, hegemonic masculinity, and homosociality. Drawing from interdisciplinary literature in gender studies, queer theory, postcolonial critique, and ethnographic research, the study examines how cultural conservatism, militarised patriarchy, and the legacy of civil war have entrenched a normative ideal of heterosexual, heroic masculinity that marginalises queer expressions of desire and identity. Particular attention is given to the experiences of *nachchi*—effeminate male sex workers—whose gender nonconformity and sexual visibility expose them to heightened social policing, institutional violence, and spatial exclusion.

Adopting a qualitative, interdisciplinary, and critical approach, the study synthesizes existing ethnographic research, theoretical literature, and digital ethnographic insights. Using the literature review as a primary method of data collection, it explores the intersections of structural and affective forces shaping rural Sri Lankan young men's same-sex desires. Rather than relying on new primary fieldwork, the study engages secondary qualitative data and socio-theoretical analysis, employing thematic coding (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2024) to trace discursive tensions and patterns of meaning-making. Key themes include militarised masculinity, institutional violence and policing, embodied expressions of desire, internalised homophobia, spatial and digital marginalisation, and homosocial intimacy.

At the same time, the paper explores how culturally sanctioned homosocial bonds—expressed through friendship, brotherhood, and emotional intimacy—provide discreet and socially permissible avenues for rural young men to experience same-sex desire. Digital platforms such as Facebook emerge as significant spaces where these affective and erotic connections are negotiated, allowing young men to explore intimacy and queer potentialities without openly defying dominant taboos. By theorising how digital homosociality intersects with structural violence, internalised shame, and everyday resilience, the paper argues that queer desire in rural Sri Lanka is not only repressed but also continuously reimagined—through covert, creative, and affectively rich strategies of survival.

Key words: Heteronormativity, Hegemonic Masculinity, Homophobia, Homosociality, Queer Rural Intimacy

Introduction

In Sri Lanka, the intimate and sexual lives of rural young men are profoundly shaped by the intersecting forces of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, and cultural practices of homosociality. These social forces operate within a deeply rooted postcolonial, militarised, and patriarchal landscape that regulates gender, desire, and identity.

Heteronormativity, far from being a mere cultural norm, functions as a political and militarised apparatus, intertwined with the legacies of the Sri Lankan civil war and nationalist ideologies that valorise a rigid ideal of heterosexual, masculine heroism. This ideal, shaped by militarised masculinity, enforces strict gender discipline and marginalises non-heteronormative sexual expressions, forcing many young men into social invisibility or exclusion (De Mel, 2016; De Silva, 2014, 2023).

Concurrently, hegemonic masculinity and institutionalised homophobia create a socio-political environment that polices and punishes expressions of same-sex desire, particularly for those who embody non-normative masculinities, such as the *nachchi*—effeminate male sex workers who negotiate identities spanning transgender and homosexual spectrums. These young men face heightened vulnerabilities due to the

combined pressures of social stigma, police violence, and spatial marginalisation both in urban settings and digital spaces. Their experiences reveal the complex ways in which desire, identity, and social exclusion are produced through the intersection of rigid masculinity norms and homophobic violence (Nichols, 2010, 2014; Miller & Nichols, 2012).

Despite these constraints, culturally sanctioned forms of male bonding, encapsulated in the concept of homosociality, provide a socially accepted space for emotional intimacy and discreet same-sex connections among rural young men. Unlike Western interpretations that often conflate such relationships with homosexuality, South Asian homosociality embraces male friendship, fraternity, and physical affection as normative expressions of closeness and support (*cf* Anderson, 2005; Arondekar, 2009). These bonds, while often non-sexualized in public discourse, can encompass erotic dimensions and offer important avenues for negotiating masculine identities in a context hostile to open queer expression (Simpson, 2004; Bose, 2004; Osella, 2012).

Digital platforms, particularly Facebook, have emerged as critical sites where rural young men can circumvent traditional restrictions and cultivate homosocial intimacy in more private and flexible ways (Jinadasa, 2024). Social media interactions—through 'likes,' comments, and messaging—help construct virtual spaces of emotional closeness, fostering relationships that might otherwise be unacknowledged or suppressed in offline social settings (Kim and Yang, 2017). This mediates new possibilities for same-sex intimacy that challenge, yet also accommodate, prevailing social taboos (Haywood et al., 2018; Hatchel et al., 2017).

Together, these intersecting themes reveal the nuanced and contested terrain of rural Sri Lankan masculinity, desire, and sexuality. This paper integrates these perspectives to examine how young men navigate the constraints of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, and homophobia while using homosociality and digital platforms as means to explore, express, and negotiate same-sex intimacies. Through a multidisciplinary approach drawing on gender studies, queer theory, postcolonial critique, and ethnographic insights, the study offers a

critical understanding of how rural Sri Lankan youth inhabit and resist dominant gender and sexual regimes in a rapidly changing socio-cultural and technological environment.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary, and critical approach by synthesizing existing ethnographic research, theoretical literature, and digital ethnographic insights. It uses the literature review as a key method of data collection to explore the intersections of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, and homosociality in rural Sri Lankan young men's same-sex desires and relationships. Rather than relying on new primary fieldwork, the study draws on secondary qualitative data and socio-theoretical analysis to critically examine how these social forces shape sexual and gendered subjectivities.

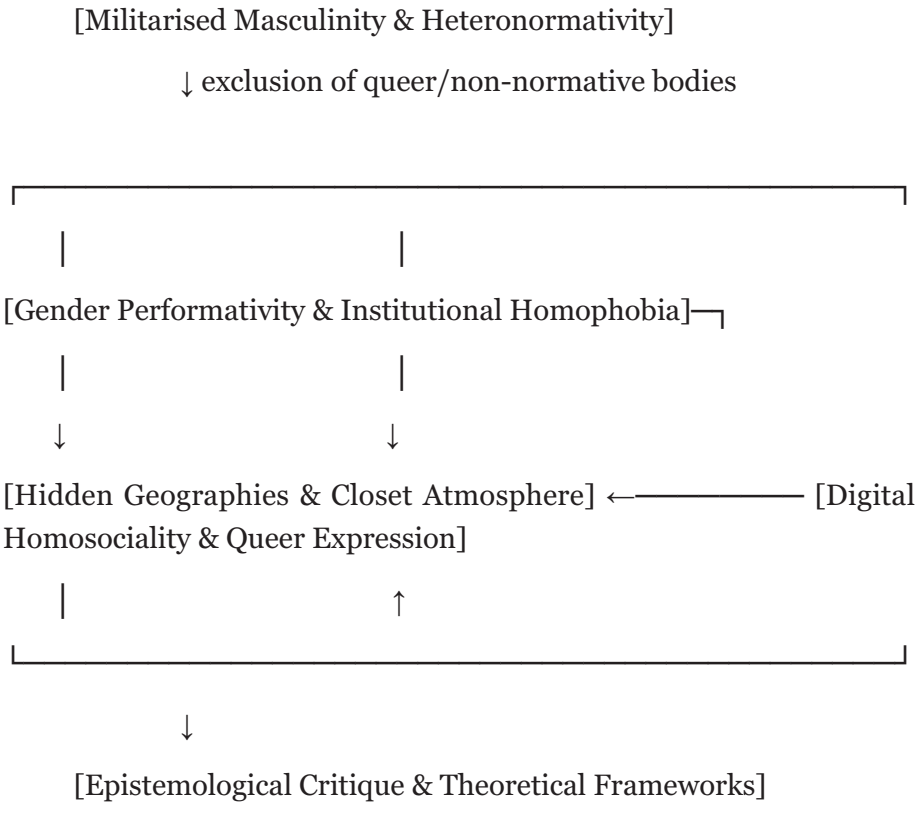
Key sources include ethnographic accounts of rural and militarised masculinities (De Silva, 2014; 2023; De Mel, 2016), in-depth interviews and focus groups with *nachchi*—effeminate male sex workers embodying transgender and homosexual identities (Nichols, 2010, 2014)—and digital ethnographic studies analyzing virtual interactions on social media platforms such as Facebook (*see also* Haywood et al., 2018; Hatchel et al., 2017).

The methodology is grounded in intersectional queer theory, postcolonial critique, and feminist epistemologies (Foucault, 1978; Butler, 1991, 2002; Harding, 2006), which frame heteronormativity not as a mere cultural norm but as a militarised, institutionalised apparatus linked to political histories, social class, and disability. The analysis employs thematic coding (Clarke and Braun, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2024) of secondary qualitative data, focusing on key themes such as militarised masculinity, institutional violence and policing, embodied expressions of desire, internalised homophobia, spatial and digital marginalisation, and homosocial intimacy.

By integrating sociological, queer theoretical, and digital ethnographic perspectives, the paper interrogates how rural Sri Lankan young men

negotiate and resist heteronormative and hegemonic masculinity norms—both offline and in virtual spaces—revealing the complex socio-political dynamics that inform their lived experiences and modes of intimate connection.

Conceptual Thematic Map.



*** Diagram – 01

Explanation of Map:

Militarised Masculinity & Heteronormativity establishes dominant masculine ideals shaped by war and nationalism.

This creates exclusion of queer, disabled, and gender non-conforming individuals, fueling institutional homophobia and policing of gender performativity.

Due to stigma and repression, queer men retreat into hidden geographies and closet atmospheres, limiting visibility but enabling survival.

Meanwhile, digital platforms create alternative spaces for queer expression and affective male bonds (homosociality), subtly challenging hegemonic norms.

All these social dynamics reflect an epistemological failure in mainstream knowledge production, calling for queer and feminist approaches that center marginalized voices and embodied experiences.

Methodological Limitations

This study relies exclusively on secondary data and literature, which limits the scope for firsthand empirical insights or updated field observations. While the synthesis approach allows for broad theoretical integration, it may overlook recent shifts or nuances in the lived experiences of rural young men in Sri Lanka. The secondary data sources, especially ethnographies and interviews, were collected in varying historical and social contexts, which may affect their contemporary relevance. Additionally, the digital ethnographic insights drawn from social media studies are interpretive and based on limited publicly available information rather than direct participant observation.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of sexuality, gender, and marginalisation in Sri Lanka, the original ethnographic research included strict ethical protocols to ensure confidentiality and respect for participants' safety and anonymity. This paper, relying on previously published data, respects these ethical boundaries by not disclosing identifying information and by contextualizing findings with cultural sensitivity. The study acknowledges the potential risks faced by rural young men and *nachchi* individuals in expressing non-normative desires, particularly under institutional surveillance and social stigma, and aims to contribute to a respectful and emancipatory discourse that challenges oppressive norms rather than reinforcing them.

Literature Review

The intersection of queer desire, rural masculinity, and postwar socio-political structures in Sri Lanka remains an underexplored area within South Asian gender and sexuality studies. Existing literature on South Asian queer lives often focuses on urban, elite, or diasporic experiences (Gopinath, 2005; Khan, 2001), neglecting how young men in rural post-conflict regions negotiate same-sex desire amid militarised patriarchy and heteronormative family structures. In contrast, studies on Sri Lankan masculinity have largely addressed nationalist and militarised configurations of manhood (De Mel, 2007; Höglund, 2011), leaving gaps in understanding how non-heteronormative expressions of masculinity persist and adapt within these constrained environments.

Research on homosociality in South Asia—especially among working-class and rural men—has highlighted the cultural normalisation of physical intimacy, emotional bonding, and same-sex closeness within heterosexual frameworks (Osella & Osella, 2006; Simpson, 2004). These forms of intimacy often operate beneath the threshold of what is labelled "homosexual" in Western contexts, making them both culturally sanctioned and ambiguously queer. Scholars such as Bose (2004) and Srivastava (2004) have shown how male friendships in South Asia provide a socially acceptable arena for emotional and sometimes erotic expressions that do not necessarily disrupt dominant masculinity norms.

Simultaneously, research on queer subjectivity in Sri Lanka—especially among *nachchi* and effeminate male sex workers—has drawn attention to the policing of gender nonconformity and the institutional violence enacted upon visibly queer bodies (Miller & Nichols, 2012; Nichols, 2014). These studies demonstrate that public visibility often invites surveillance, exclusion, or brutality, particularly in militarised and conservative rural areas. The intersection of homophobia with postwar nationalism intensifies the marginalisation of those who challenge or deviate from hegemonic masculinity.

In digital spaces, however, new possibilities emerge. Scholars have examined how queer Sri Lankan youth engage with social media platforms such as Facebook to build networks, express desire, and

negotiate visibility (De Silva, 2023; Haywood et al., 2018). These platforms enable affective intimacy, performative masculinity, and private desire in ways that often circumvent offline social constraints. Yet, digital queer expression is also vulnerable to online harassment, state surveillance, and cultural shaming, particularly in rural communities where anonymity is harder to maintain (Hatchel et al., 2017).

This paper builds upon and extends these discussions by centering rural young men in postwar Sri Lanka—not just as subjects of homophobia and exclusion, but also as agents of subtle queer world-making. It focuses on how male-male intimacy, facilitated through homosocial norms and digital interfaces, becomes a site of both survival and subversion under conditions of social repression.

Theoretical Framework

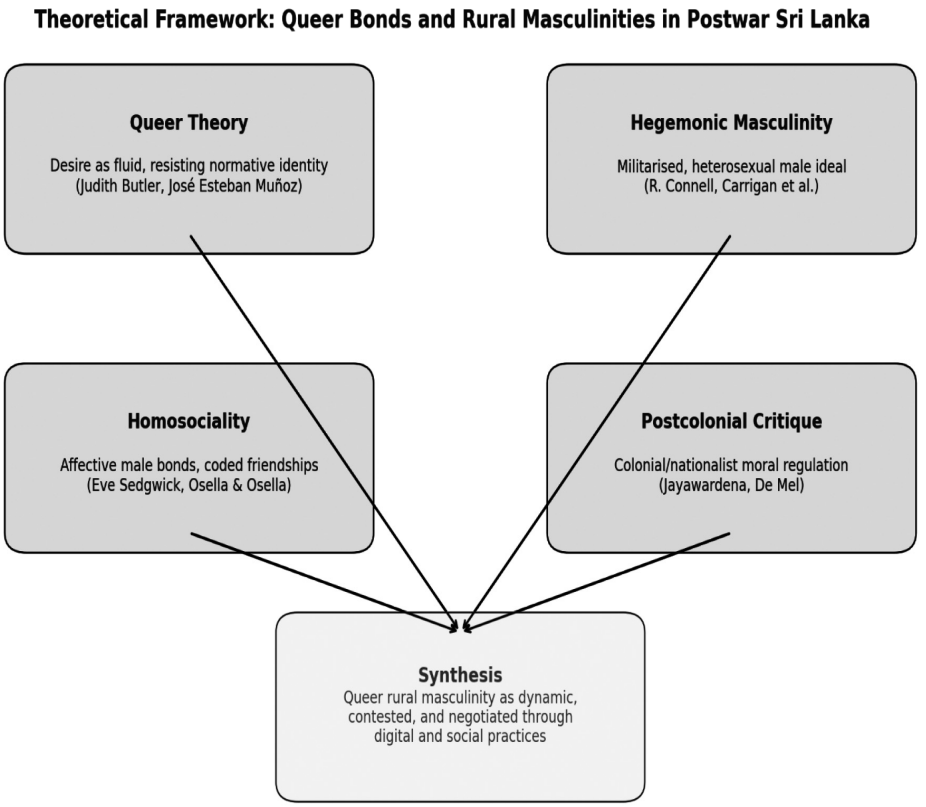


Diagram - 02

This study draws on four interrelated theoretical lenses: queer theory, hegemonic masculinity, homosociality, and postcolonial critique, contextualised within Sri Lanka's militarised and rural socio-political landscape.

First, queer theory provides the conceptual tools to interrogate how normative sexual identities and desires are constructed, disciplined, and resisted. Following the work of scholars like Judith Butler (1990) and José Esteban Muñoz (2009), this paper views queerness not as a fixed identity but as a set of practices, desires, and relational possibilities that exceed the heteronormative order. This perspective allows the study to engage with male-male intimacy in rural Sri Lanka not as evidence of a fixed "gay" identity, but as fluid, affective, and strategic engagements with desire.

Second, hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Carrigan et al., 1985) offers a framework for understanding how certain forms of masculinity—especially those tied to militarism, heterosexuality, and patriarchy—are institutionalised and rewarded, while others are marginalised or punished. In postwar Sri Lanka, the figure of the militarised male hero becomes a dominant ideal, rendering queerer or effeminate masculinities subordinate or deviant.

Third, homosociality—as theorised by Eve Sedgwick (1985) and expanded in South Asian contexts by Osella & Osella (2006)—helps unpack the ambiguities and affective layers of male bonding in cultures where male intimacy is culturally sanctioned but sexually policed. This framework is particularly useful for analysing how rural young men navigate their desires within accepted norms of friendship, loyalty, and fraternity, without necessarily naming or politicising their desires as queer.

Finally, the study engages postcolonial critique to locate these gendered and sexual dynamics within broader histories of colonial moral regulation, nationalist militarism, and development discourse (Jayawardena, 1986; De Mel, 2001). The entrenchment of heteronormative masculinity in the name of cultural tradition or national security is not neutral but historically and politically produced.

By synthesising these frameworks, this paper theorises queer rural masculinity as a contested and dynamic terrain—where visibility is both a threat and a possibility, and where homosocial bonds and digital practices serve as subtle sites for negotiating intimacy, shame, and survival.

Discussion

This paper critically examines the intersections of militarised masculinity, heteronormativity, gender non-conformity, and digital queer expressions among rural young men in Sri Lanka. By drawing together ethnographic, cultural, and theoretical insights, the discussion situates same-sex desire and non-normative masculinities within broader socio-political structures of control, exclusion, and emergent agency.

Visual Thematic Map

graph TD

A[Militarised Masculinity & Heteronormativity]

B[Gender Performativity & Institutional Homophobia]

C[Hidden Geographies & Closet Atmosphere]

D[Digital Homosociality & Queer Expression]

E[Epistemological Critique & Theoretical Frameworks]

A —> B

B —> C

C —> D

D —> C

C —> E

D —> E

A —> E

B —> E

Diagram – 03

Explanation of Flow

- **A → B:** Militarised masculine ideals create and reinforce institutional homophobia and gender policing.
- **B → C:** This policing pushes queer/gender non-conforming men into hidden spaces or the "closet."
- **C → D:** Despite repression, digital platforms offer alternative spaces for queer expression and homosocial bonds.
- **D → C:** Digital and physical invisibility coexist and influence each other.
- **A, B, C, D → E:** All these phenomena expose gaps in mainstream knowledge, leading to a call for epistemological shifts centered on queer rural men's lived realities.

Militarised Heteronormativity and the Crisis of Queer Embodiment

The legacy of the civil war in Sri Lanka has profoundly shaped the normative landscape of masculinity. As De Silva (2014; 2023) articulates, the war produced an archetype of the ideal man: militarised, athletic, loyal to ethnic and nationalist causes, and emphatically heterosexual. In rural areas, where military recruitment and nationalist sentiment were deeply embedded, young men were not only socialised into these ideals but materially rewarded for embodying them. Militarised masculinity thus became the dominant standard against which all male bodies were measured.

Those who failed to meet this standard—queer men, men with disabilities, economically marginalised youth—were often marked as "failed men." War-related disability became a site of emasculation. As De Mel (2016) argues, disability undercuts the ideal of able-bodied strength necessary for both military and heterosexual performance. This created what might be termed a *crisis of embodiment*, wherein young men found themselves excluded from the symbolic economy of masculinity due to their failure to perform heteronormative, militarised, or economically productive roles. Their same-sex desires became doubly

suppressed—first, as non-heterosexual, and second, as non-militarised—pushing them into either silence or invisibility.

Gender Performativity and Institutional Homophobia

Building on Judith Butler's (1988; 2002) concept of gender performativity, this study engages with the figure of the *nachchi*—effeminate men and transgender feminine persons who openly display gender fluidity through speech, dress, and gesture. Their embodiment of femininity directly challenges the hegemonic gender binary, provoking harsh social backlash and familial rejection (Nichols, 2014). Cultural homophobia in Sri Lanka, as Lyonga (2021) points out, is not merely institutional but also internalised and affective. *Nachchi* individuals, especially in rural communities, experience both external discrimination and internalised self-hatred (Herek, 2004), amplified by dominant religious discourse, family control, and media representations that stigmatise same-sex desire (Arteta, 2019; Devasunrendra, 2020).

This intersection of gender non-conformity and same-sex desire exposes how heteronormativity is not only a cultural ideal but also a regime of policing. Law enforcement routinely targets visibly gender-nonconforming individuals—not necessarily for the criminal act of homosexuality itself, but for their defiance of masculine decorum. The Sinhala term *ponnaya* operates not merely as a slur but as a social mechanism of surveillance and punishment. As Nichols (2010; 2014) and Wijewardene & Jayawardene (2019) observe, police harassment and violence disproportionately affect those whose gender performance deviates from masculine norms, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity as both a social and legal norm.

Hidden Geographies and the Closet Atmosphere

Given the pervasive stigma and threat of violence, same-sex intimacy among Sri Lankan men often retreats into what Bersani (1995) and Osella & Osella (2006) call "closet atmospheres." These hidden or liminal spaces—backstreets, abandoned houses, and clandestine urban clubs—function as ephemeral zones of queer possibility. However, this

invisibility does not equate to safety. Rather, it reflects what Richmond & McKenna (1998) term "avoidance homophobia," wherein society tolerates queer existence only if it remains unseen, unspoken, and unchallenging to heteronormative order.

Such spatial regulation serves as both a metaphor and mechanism for exclusion. It ensures that queer life is lived in the shadows, reinforcing the idea that same-sex desire is incompatible with public visibility, family legitimacy, or national belonging. This architectural and social invisibility fractures queer subjectivity, compelling rural queer men to compartmentalise their sexual selves and live under constant threat of exposure.

Digital Platforms and Homosocial Erotics

Despite these oppressive conditions, rural queer men are not passive recipients of stigma. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, provide alternative spaces for expression, connection, and experimentation. Simpson (2004) and Osella (2012) note that homosocial bonding—close, affectionate relationships between men—has long been culturally permissible in South Asia, often superseding romantic heterosexual ties in importance before marriage. Digital platforms now extend this dynamic, offering a new medium for rural men to participate in emotionally intense relationships that, while coded as friendship, often contain latent eroticism.

These digital homosocialities operate through what Arora and Scheiber (2017) describe as "vernacular digital practices"—likes, selfies, comments, and emojis—under the guise of brotherhood. Cooper & Dzara (2010) and Matsick et al. (2020) show how such informal interactions create opportunities for queer expression without triggering overt suspicion. Haywood et al. (2018) identify this phenomenon as "bromance": emotionally deep male-male relationships that are heterosocially permissible yet queer in their affective intensity.

Moreover, LGBTQ+ individuals increasingly use social media for strategic self-disclosure (Hatchel et al., 2017), crafting hybrid identities that challenge the strict binaries of gay/straight, masculine/feminine.

This opens a space for "closeted visibility"—a form of queer presence that is simultaneously legible and deniable, playful and coded, erotic and ambiguous. In this context, Facebook functions not merely as a communication platform but as a site of affective labor and queer world-building, offering rural men a way to experiment with alternative masculinities and relational configurations within the bounds of social acceptability.

Epistemological Shifts and Theoretical Possibilities

The marginalisation of queer rural men in Sri Lanka is not merely a social problem but also an epistemological failure. As Harding (2006) and Harding & Norberg (2005) argue, dominant forms of social science often reproduce the very structures of exclusion they claim to study. Mainstream research frequently sidelines non-urban, non-Western, non-heterosexual voices, rendering them invisible in both academic and policy discourse.

To challenge this, we must move toward a feminist and queer epistemology that centers lived experience, bodily knowledge, and affective realities. Following Rubin (1984; 1993) and Rich (1980), this paper calls for an interrogation of how gender and sexuality are organised within institutional structures—religious, familial, legal, and educational—that naturalise heterosexuality and criminalise queer variance.

By bringing together militarised nationalism, gender performativity, homosocial digital cultures, and epistemic critique, this discussion opens a space to rethink the politics of desire, identity, and visibility in postwar Sri Lanka. It also gestures toward the urgent need for more inclusive knowledge practices that attend to the voices and vulnerabilities of queer rural men—voices that too often remain unheard in the dominant narratives of gender, sexuality, and nationhood.

Conclusion

This paper has critically examined how heteronormativity in rural Sri Lanka functions as a militarised and institutionalised regime of

gendered control. Informed by postwar nationalism, religious morality, and patriarchal family structures, young men are socialised into rigid ideals of masculinity that reward heterosexual conformity and emotional restraint. Those who fail to embody this normative masculinity—particularly queer, disabled, or economically vulnerable individuals—are subjected to layers of social exclusion, symbolic erasure, and institutional violence. The analysis of *nachchi* identities underscores how gender nonconformity is not only marginalised but actively targeted as a threat to national and moral order. Yet, in their visibility and vulnerability, *nachchis* also represent powerful figures of resistance, unsettling the performative stability of hegemonic masculinity.

In this landscape of constraint, digital platforms like Facebook have emerged as discreet yet meaningful arenas for queer negotiation. Within culturally sanctioned modes of homosocial bonding—expressed through friendship, care, and emotional intimacy—rural young men engage in affective, embodied, and erotic forms of connection. These online spaces offer a way to inhabit queer desire without openly confronting societal taboos, illustrating how digital homosociality serves both as camouflage and as an infrastructure for queer world-making.

What emerges from this study is a picture of queer life that is neither wholly visible nor fully erased—but shaped by a constant interplay between repression and creativity, silence and expression. The marginalisation of rural queer subjectivities is not incidental but produced through epistemic violence: a refusal to recognise certain lives, bodies, and desires as legitimate subjects of knowledge and politics. Drawing on scholars such as Rubin, Harding, and Rich, this paper argues that reclaiming these voices requires a reorientation in both theory and method—toward lived realities, affective modes of knowing, and alternative queer epistemologies rooted in place and experience.

Ultimately, the lives of rural queer young men compel us to rethink how visibility, resistance, and subjectivity are constituted beyond urban and global metronormative frameworks. Their experiences call for an ethics of attention—one that listens to the silences, reads between coded expressions, and affirms the dignity of marginal voices. Future research

must move beyond treating rural queer lives as peripheral or exceptional and instead centre them as critical to any serious inquiry into gender, sexuality, and power in postcolonial South Asia. At stake is not only academic recognition but the transformative potential of acknowledging and legitimising lives that persist, resist, and reimagine in the face of everyday erasure.

Future Research Directives

Building on the insights of this paper, future research must critically expand the scope of inquiry into rural queer life beyond isolated case studies or metropolitan frameworks. Long-term ethnographic fieldwork with queer and gender non-conforming individuals in remote and war-affected areas of Sri Lanka would provide a richer understanding of how post-war masculinities, nationalism, and socio-economic hardship intersect with non-normative sexualities and identities.

Further, there is an urgent need to examine how digital platforms function as sites of both liberation and control. While this paper has touched upon Facebook's role in mediating queer homosocial desire, future studies should explore how algorithmic structures, surveillance, and platform moderation practices shape what forms of queer expression are rendered visible, respectable, or risky online.

Comparative regional research across South Asia's rural queer populations—including Tamil Nadu, Bangladesh, and southern Nepal—could offer vital insights into shared postcolonial anxieties around gender, caste, religion, and sexuality. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaborations with digital anthropology, queer psychology, and affect theory would help map how desire and identity circulate within and against dominant heteromasculine narratives in diverse cultural terrains.

Lastly, future research must remain committed to epistemic justice by co-producing knowledge with queer rural individuals themselves. This includes using participatory methods, life histories, and performative ethnography to decolonize the modes through which queer life is documented, theorized, and represented.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Considering the findings, several key recommendations are put forward for scholars, activists, policymakers, and educators engaged in the pursuit of gender equity, queer justice, and rural empowerment:

1. Queer-Inclusive Rural Policy and Advocacy

   Governmental and non-governmental actors must acknowledge the presence of queer lives in rural areas and work to ensure their access to rights, healthcare, education, and legal protection. Rural development policies should embed a queer-inclusive lens, moving beyond urban-centric frameworks of LGBTQ+ visibility.

2. Mental Health and Educational Reform

   Schools and youth-focused institutions in rural areas must integrate anti-homophobic training and gender diversity education. There is a pressing need for culturally sensitive mental health services that understand queer struggles not as pathologies but as responses to hostile social environments.

3. Digital Safety and Queer Media Literacy

   With digital platforms becoming essential sites of expression and exploration, targeted interventions are needed to enhance digital safety, queer media literacy, and algorithmic awareness. This includes creating toolkits, helplines, and support networks specifically tailored for queer youth in rural digital spaces.

4. Cultural and Artistic Interventions

   Supporting rural queer voices through folk art, street theatre, photography, and documentary can provide powerful counter-narratives to hegemonic masculinity and offer alternative imaginaries of intimacy, resistance, and beauty rooted in local traditions.

5. Collaborative Knowledge Production

   Academic researchers must shift from extractive models of fieldwork to collaborative and ethically grounded methodologies. Including queer rural individuals as co-researchers, archivists, and theorists is essential for generating decolonial and affectively resonant forms of knowledge.

By enacting these recommendations, we not only affirm the presence and agency of rural queer individuals but also begin the difficult yet necessary task of remaking the symbolic and material structures that continue to erase, marginalise, and pathologise them. Visibility, after all, is not a solution in itself—but a means to foster justice, belonging, and transformation.

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