

IMPACT

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Effects of social media on children



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For more than a decade, the influence of social media has moved many people from a spare part of entertainment to a fully integrated part of almost every aspect of everyday life. The term “social media” is the most used word today. It’s a powerful weapon, and has brought a powerful revolution in society. The impact on social media can be divided into many categories. There is no one today who doesn’t use social media. Everything has changed dramatically in the past two years, including social media and society. We’ve seen the impact of social media on children.

We need to know an explanation about the impact of social media on children, because the two words are inextricably linked. In an interview with the *Sunday Observer*, Dinithi Jayasekara, who is a senior lecturer at the University of Kelaniya and an Attorney-at-Law, explained the connection between social media and children.

Q: What is social media?

A: When we talk about the Internet, we often use the word “new media.” Within the new medium, we use social media as a sub-set. Various definitions have been put forward in this regard. We can refer to social media as something that has user-created content and interaction as well as digital technology. And within the concept of social media, the internet is what we can talk about most of the time. We can introduce social media as a medium that is more interactive, then the content productivity of the users, as well as a medium that can deal with a wide range of information compared to other media.

Most of the time, when we talk about social media, we can identify with sharing. People use the internet and use social media. Social media can be seen in relation to social interaction. But most of the time, nowadays, it has become difficult to find a person who does not have a social media account.

Social media has become popular. There are people who have a social

media account, but do not interact and use social media actively. When we do research, we find people like this. Today, social media can be introduced as a popular medium among the Sri Lankan subscriber community.

Social media is used for a variety of things because of its ability to easily connect with people, be easy for people to use, and have features that attract people. With the current Covid-19 epidemic, the use of social media has increased with the new normalcy. We have the ability to identify a group of social media users of different ages.

Q: What are your views on the current state of social media and children?

A: We can see an increase in social media and internet use after 2019. We can assume an increase in overall social media and internet usage rather than whether it is children or adults. Many people had to work from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. People can be identified with a focus on various social media platforms, especially social media and the Internet.

Among them, children are special. Because schools had to be closed. Children often had to use social media such as Zoom technology and WhatsApp for educational purposes as a learning tool. This was used vigorously in schools as an educational tool for children. That is to say, social media such as WhatsApp was used to share information, to inform parents, sometimes to share notes, and to teach lessons. As a result, parents had to provide their children with an Internet-enabled computer, a cell phone, and a tablet for educational purposes.

Even parents who did not like to give such tools to their children had to give children such tools for educational purposes. Because of this, children are tempted to use the internet and social media. Education was the primary purpose for which parents provided their children with Internet-enabled telephones and computers. But we observed the problematic situation here only in the past two years or so. Parents have a problem with their children using the Internet or social media, such as YouTube.

Are they actually using social media only for educational purpose? The main problem here is that if we talk specifically about Sri Lanka, we can identify some incidents in the recent



Dinithi Jayasekara

past where minors have become addicted to mobile phones to the point of suicide. American research recently found that children under the age of 12 spend most of their time on screening.

It has become a huge problem. Children may be watching a cartoon, watching a video, listening to a song, or playing a game, but in general, screening is a problem since they spend a lot of time on that. This screen time has been identified as a problem in various experiments based on parental feedback. Many parents seek medical advice and other help to save their child from this screening time. I think, together with this situation, has become a major social problem today.

Q: The pros and cons of social media

A: Social media is a useful thing. It can be used as an educational tool as well as an entertainment tool, and social media can be used for a variety of things such as business needs. Social media is used for many things, such as enhancing the image of a country.

Even today almost every institution has a social media account. Whether it is a media institution or a private institution, they create their own account. Any such institution uses social media as an easy way to publicise its image.

People who use social media need to know what we do and how we use it. We know that our ideas can be easily socialised. We can start a blog, or distribute information on Facebook since the most used social media in Sri Lanka is Facebook, and we can post as soon as we like. We have a medium that is easy to use at our fingertips. We can like the post, we can comment on someone’s post, we can share things, and we can upload our own things easily.

Sometimes social media can be called the best way to socialise important information, but we can also use social media for bad things too. Fake news and misinformation can be one of the main areas of global research during the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been a lot of research on the extent to which social media has been used for misinformation and disinformation in recent times. We need to question whether everything on social media is right.

This is important not only for children but for all of us. I think social media is a medium that requires literacy. Because when it comes to media literacy, we have to think about the extent to which we understand what is contained in it, and what can be harmed by and what we understand without filtering. Is what we see on social media real? How much is it edited? How many gatekeeping opportunities do we go through?

We cannot forget what we used to think about the art of media, even on social media. But sometimes the information that we publish on our own blog, on Facebook, is actually published without looking for any source, without seeing any information, and it is published because someone said so. Dissemination of such information can lead to problems.

Q: Why are children so interested in social media?

A: There are some commonalities in world research related to social media that are relevant to our country and can be applied to ours. Social media can be used for sharing, a solution to loneliness, something that

can be used for games, something that can be used for entertainment. For these reasons, a child who uses a mobile phone can either create their own social media account or become accustomed to their parents’ social media account. Different social aspects can be identified in this matter.

We live in a competitive society. As a result, parents are less likely to look after their children. Something that parents can easily do is giving their children a cell phone because they want to work. There may be children watching cartoons, listening to a song, or watching something harmful, Obscene content, hateful content, child inappropriate content, or unwanted addiction to games on social media can be influenced by this condition. We report a harmful situation that goes beyond parental observation. Sometimes parents think that what the child is doing is learning, so we should not bother. At such times, children take advantage of it. Another harmful condition is loneliness.

Various studies have identified the loneliness that children feel, the inability to tell their parents about school, and the problems that children face in the classroom, lead children to use social media to alleviate their loneliness. Sometimes they are tempted to play a game, chat with strangers, or have video calls. Here we can identify some harmful situations. We can assume that children will use social media as a solution to their loneliness when they lose parental observation. It is easy for us to point the finger at the children or the parents, but that is not the answer to the question.

As Sri Lanka’s computer emergency readiness team says, after 2019, there has been an increase in the number of abuses related to social media, especially Facebook. Their research suggests that these problems may have increased with being at home. As internet usage increases, so does the abuse associated with social media. In today’s competitive society, including children’s education systems, we do not teach children to tolerate win and

lose. Parents also convince their children to win somehow. Because of this, children cannot even bear to lose a video game and think that the best solution is to commit suicide.

Q: what action can we take to reduce this addiction?

A: On the other hand, there are laws in Sri Lanka for these social media-related issues. It is enforced in Sri Lanka. But not all these problems can be solved by law because there are times when social media cannot be controlled within the technical scope. Sometimes, when we ban a pornographic website, another website is created with the use of technology.

Parents need to be aware of these things. Children need to be taught both the pros and cons of the social media they use. Interventions can be made, especially through schools. One of the problems facing parents today is whether, with the new normalisation, children will be able to study without social media and the Internet.

Sometimes we still see online learning with controls in society. It is not possible to keep the child safe from social media and computers. All we have to do is, creating an understanding and a methodology to protect the child by giving him the media. We cannot force the Government to do these things, and there is no need for that. Parents can help their children understand the pros and cons of using the media. But sometimes there are times when parents’ backgrounds are not the same. Children are more technologically advanced than their parents. If teachers could somehow monitor the use of children’s media in schools at such times, these problematic situations could be avoided.

Social media is not a bad thing on children. If we use social media correctly, we can go so far than we think.