

QUEER ACTIVISM AND EMPOWERMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

A study based on Northern Province, Sri Lanka

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New social movements and activism have been established across social media around the globe and this can be seen in Sri Lanka as well. The LGBTIQ+ community of northern Sri Lanka has a different culture from other places in Sri Lanka in that they work together forgetting all boundaries of class, caste, education, and other factors for a better future. Equal Ground, Venasa Transgender Network, the Community Welfare and Development Fund Sri Lanka, Chathra, Equite, Anichcham, Eastern Queer Collective, Voice of Queer, Sanyog, Jaffna Sangam, Jaffna Transgender Network, National Transgender Network, Voice for Equality and Voice of Edge are some of the LGBTIQ+ organizations in Sri Lanka. Jaffna Sangam and Jaffna Transgender Network are the main organizations that fight for queer rights in the northern part of Sri Lanka.

Using observation, surveys, and in-depth interviews, this study analyzes data on how LGBTIQ+ activism and empowerment function on social media in Sri Lanka and the impact that is created through such activism. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used for the analysis. Social media content was analyzed, and queer and non-queer activists were interviewed. The findings of the study indicate that the activism and exposure of the LGBTQIA+ community through social media had many positive impacts. Social media have created space for activism and empowerment through disseminating information about queer people, hashtag movements, social media groups, and more even, although LGBTQIA+ activists faced different challenges while they carried out their activism.

Setting the context

The northern part of Sri Lanka has a distinct culture from the rest of the country, where the majority of the Tamil-speaking community resides. According to the Equal Ground survey done in 2021, approximately 12% of the Sri Lankan population is homosexual. Queer people are invisible in Sri Lanka. Queer folk (LGBTIQA+) are affected by social disapproval and legal restrictions in the country. The thoughts and ideas of Sri Lankans are mostly influenced by patriarchal and religious ideologies. Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and Muslims are the major religions practiced in Sri Lanka. Hindus are the majority community in Sri Lanka's Northern Province. These religions oppose the queer community and homosexuality. The idea of gender is culturally formulated and structured.

It is here that social media has proven to be useful. The technological revolution is not gender-neutral. It reflects the offline world; however, it is a powerful medium to change society as shown in Sri Lanka. Queer people who live in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka face various gender-related challenges and barriers via social media. Queer people in northern Sri Lanka face multiple forms of oppression and are particularly vulnerable on social media. However, social media refers to the various services that anybody can use to interact with people, and it is playing a prominent role in this century to upgrade the lives of the queer community. The study explores how LGBTIQA+ activism and empowerment function on social media and what type of impact is created through LGBTIQA+ activism and empowerment on social media with LGBTIQA+ organizations in Sri Lanka.

Laws in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, like other South Asian countries, was under British colonial rule, which criminalized homosexuality and other forms of gender plurality in their colonies. After independence, only a few countries reviewed these discriminatory laws. Sri Lanka still enforces colonial law. Sri Lanka still criminalizes homosexuality under sections 365 and 365A of the penal code. Section 399 of the Penal Code, "cheating by personation," affects transgender people (www.humandignitytrust.org). Due to this, the queer community is often victimized and harassed in both online and offline spaces. These laws allow police to harass and target the queer community. According to Circular No. 0-34/2016 issued in December 2016 by the Ministry of Health, Nutrition, and Indigenous Medical Services, gender recognition certificates may only be issued by the ministry, upon completion of a legal medical process by transgender persons.

Social media in Sri Lanka

Social media platforms allow users to communicate, share information, and create web content. There are many forms of social media, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Viber, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and more (Pain, 2022). Social media has served as a space where LGBTIQ+ people can develop their identities. Social media creates a way for activism and organizes different movements, parades, and rallies. It gives activists numerous opportunities to normalize things and raise awareness of queer people.

After 2010, social media platforms became popular among Sri Lankans. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, and WhatsApp are the ones mainly used by people in Northern Sri Lanka. The use of social media has been rapidly rising in recent years. It is becoming an important window for freedom among the LGBTIQ+ people of Northern Province, Sri Lanka. However, social media use negatively impacts people in many ways. The risk percentage is high for women and LGBTIQ+ people on social media in the Northern Province.

The LGBTIQ+ community also engages on Facebook at a high level. Unfortunately, because of the hate speech and cyberbullying they experienced in cyberspace, some LGBTIQ+ people avoid or leave Facebook. In Sri Lanka, LGBTIQ+ people, LGBT activists, and organizations are using Twitter actively for social change and support. However, cyberbullying happens on Twitter as well. Compared with other social media platforms, Twitter is a safer space. LGBTIQ+ people, LGBT activists, and organizations use WhatsApp for personal and professional communication. Most people add individuals to groups without much consideration. This can often lead to violence in the offline sphere.

Instagram is also used by LGBTIQ+ people, LGBT activists, and organizations in Sri Lanka. But it's not used at a major level, according to the respondent's feedback. However, Instagram users have recently increased in Sri Lanka's Northern Province. LGBTIQ+ people, LGBT activists, and organizations use YouTube for many purposes. Videos uploaded on YouTube are often related to queer festivals, pride celebrations, get-togethers, awareness programs, cultural events, and news by queer people and queer activists. But researchers have noticed hate speech, threats, cyberbullying, and other forms of online violence. TikTok is a popular platform for people to express their individuality and talents. The majority of gay people in Sri Lanka's Northern Province use TikTok. It became a trendsetter during COVID-19. It is assisting queer people to come to terms with their identities.

Methods

A descriptive qualitative analysis was used for the analysis. Observation and in-depth interviews were used as well. Social media content was analyzed, and queer activists were interviewed for this study. For this study, 10 queer activists ($n = 5$ queer and $n = 5$ non-queer people) and 40 queer people ranging in age from 18 to 40 were interviewed. Purposive sampling techniques and snowball sampling were used. The queer activists' experience ranged from 1 to 10 years. Interview recordings ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. All the interviews were in the Tamil language, which the majority of the people in the Northern Province speak. The study discusses four main categories from the interview and observation, such as queer organizations, queer activists, and queer people; social media movements and impact through LGBTIQ+ activism and empowerment. The study investigates the following:

RQ 1: How do LGBTIQ+ activism and empowerment function on social media in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka?

RQ 2: What is the impact created through LGBTIQ+ activism and empowerment on social media by LGBTIQ+ organizations?

Results and discussion

The results of the study indicate that the activism and exposure of the LGBTIQ+ community through social media were observed at a high level and had many positive impacts on society. Social media have created space for activism and empowerment through disseminating information about queer people, hashtag movements, social media groups, and more. LGBTIQ+ people and activists face challenges on social media while carrying out their activism. Patriarchy is so pervasive that men tend to occupy the spotlight.

Organizations

There are many organizations in Sri Lanka fighting for LGBTIQ+ rights, and a big part of the movement also includes young online activists that contribute to the movement in a variety of different ways. And queer organizations are working on empowering and uplifting the LGBTIQ+ community. There are many youth-led initiatives that disseminate information about queer issues, sexuality, and gender identity on social media and other online platforms in the hopes of creating a safe and supportive

environment for queer people in northern Sri Lanka. The Jaffna Peninsula is home to several queer organizations, such as the Jaffna Sangam, Jaffna Transgender Network, Voice for Equality, and Voice of Edge, which represent the northern queer community. Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaitivu, and Kilinochchi are all districts in Sri Lanka's Northern Province. LGBTIQ+ people are living in these places. All four queer organizations are in the Jaffna district, even though these organizations focus on all the queer members in this province.

The foremost LGBTIQ+ organization in Sri Lanka is Equal Ground, which has been working for more than 15 years in Sri Lanka since 2004 for equitable human and political rights for LGBTIQ+ people. Flamer-Caldera, the founder and executive director of Equal Ground, has faced high-profile attacks on her character, and she and her organization have been subjected to discrimination, harassment, stigmatization, and threats of violence by state officials and members of the public, including the media. Sri Lanka's first pride walk started in Colombo in 2005 at Taj Samudra, and it was attended by more than 300 people. The LGBTIQ+ community in Sri Lanka celebrates Pride month and showcases its diverse talents. Social media also promotes their activities, including the Pride walk and social media platforms spread awareness of them among the Sri Lankan community. Most of these queer organizations utilize Facebook and Facebook pages, as well as Twitter, to achieve their goals. LGBTIQ+ people and activists also use social media and digital technologies as a sphere for their activism and empowerment. These people actively engage on various social media platforms for positive change.

Jaffna Sangam

Jaffna Sangam is the first queer space for the Tamil-speaking queer community and was started on June 17, 2017. Thenmoli Magret, Karso Pon-nuththurai, Waradas Thiyagaraja, and Angel Queentus are the founders of the organization. Jaffna Sangam was originally initiated with the intention of decentralizing ownership of the LGBTIQ movement, which has been largely centralized within Colombo among a primarily English- and Sinhala-speaking audience. Jaffna Sangam uses different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and more. Jaffna Sangam started to connect the Tamil-speaking queer community together and create awareness and understanding among them. It's a milestone they have achieved in queer activism by starting a queer organization and functioning in a traditional place like Jaffna. Thenmoli Magret said, "They are working for the human rights of the queer community. Although the organization assists the queer community in overcoming queer issues and

provides medical care, employment, and housing. Also, they are working to enhance the skill development and empowerment of the community". She added, "We have a powerful voice among Tamil-speaking people in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. We carry out a lot of online events, creating a good understanding about our community amongst the Tamil-speaking community". Karso stated that their main goal is to create a safe space for LGBT people in Sri Lanka's Northern Province so that whenever a community member identifying as LGBT faces issues at work, in public, or in their family, they can support them.

Jaffna Transgender Network

Jaffna Transgender Network is a volunteer-run network in Jaffna working to build community livelihoods for transgender, queer, and gender non-conforming individuals. Angel Queentus is the founder and director of the Jaffna Transgender Network. A longtime advocate for LGBTQ+ rights in Jaffna, she says, "The hardships, discrimination, and challenges I faced in my life made me start this organization in the hope it would help future generations of transgender persons". Angel works with a transgender community in Jaffna that, like many such communities all over the globe, is disproportionately hurt by a lack of education, a lack of access to resources, and attitudes from neighbors that range from hostile to indifferent. With the Jaffna Transgender Network, she launched a series of online events to celebrate Pride month, including photography and essay competitions and online discussions. She sees her work there as a chance to promote general awareness of the LGBTQ+ community online. She is also a coordinating partner of Colombo PRIDE 2021, which is a nationwide celebration of LGBTQ+ diversity and activism based in Sri Lanka's capital city. "PRIDE 2021 is about celebrating resilience and re-energizing community spirit". She says queer community members are working to combat transphobia and homophobia.

Angel said, "When Jaffna Transgender Network started, there was no connection or network with queer people, other communities, or organizations". After the creation of social media platforms for the Jaffna Transgender Network, it's become a bridge between people from various places beyond Sri Lanka. Through social media, people easily communicate with the Jaffna Transgender Network. If there are any LGBTQIA+ members in need, they can contact us from every corner of the globe." And when people – students, researchers, and queer people – search about queer people or the queer community, they can find us through social media. Jaffna Transgender Network uses a Facebook page, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and more.

Voice for equality

Voice for Equality is a nongovernmental organization that supports young LGBT queers through education and awareness to improve their quality of life. It was started on February 4, 2022, when it was named “Jaffna LGBT queers.” They changed the name to Voice for Equality in March 2022 to focus on the Tamil-speaking queer community. It’s become a voice for Tamil queer people. Antonyclive Antonyseelan is the founder of Voice for Equality. He’s described as nonbinary. Voice for Equality uses Facebook, its Facebook page, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Twitter. They have a plan to create Instagram soon.

Antonyclive Antonyseelan said, “We have a lot of activities done by our organization”. We have completed numerous employment projects. First and foremost, I educated community members about our law. We continue to follow British law, which discriminates against our community. I conducted many workshops and trainings for university students, government servants, and the public to create awareness about sexual orientation and gender identity.

Voice of edge

Voice of Edge is a charity organization. It was started on Trans Day, November 18, 2022, and is a platform that raises a voice for the rights and essentials of all marginalized people in society, such as queer people, people with special needs, and other marginalized communities. Anyhow, this organization mainly focuses on the transgender community. Jonisha (Ezhanila) is the founder of the organization. Jonisha said, “They started this organization to empower the transgender community and other marginalized people”. They primarily address basic needs, education, and empowerment.

Last December, the voluntary organization Voices of Edge and Voice for Equality organized a year-end celebration and fire camping on Delft Island, according to Voice of Edge LGBT members who participated in the celebration. Within the celebration, they organized an explanatory speech about HIV. Voice of the Edge actively uses Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms to archive its content. It communicates about its activities, movements, and other information.

Queer activists and queer people

The LGBTIQ+ people of Northern Province are more active in the digital era. Many members of the queer community feel optimistic as a result of

the progress. Unfortunately, a lack of sex education, patriarchal ideology, religious and cultural influences, and colonial law affect them, and they are underrepresented not only in offline spaces but also in online spaces. LGBTIQ+ people are fighting for an inclusive representation of the queer community in the country in all spaces, online and offline. Social media fights against stigma and brings the LGBTQ community together in northern Sri Lanka. Many queer activists and the queer community raise awareness, educate people and empower people through social media. Online activism and social movements in Northern Sri Lanka after 2014 provide innovative and refreshing perspectives and insights on a wide range of instances of online activism in northern Sri Lanka.

Karso Ponnuththurai is a queer activist, a poet, and a veterinary surgeon by profession. He has nearly a decade of coordinating efforts on the LGBTQI+ frontline. He said,

I do my activism with Jaffna Sangam and Jaffna Transgender Network for Tamil-speaking Queer people. I started my activism in 2014 and have actively worked through social media and physically. Social media is the best platform for queer activism because it provides many opportunities.

A trans woman said,

Some people will leave comments to encourage and support me if I write a post or upload a photo. That helped me come out with my own identity. As a result, there is a public debate about whether or not society accepts us posting or uploading a photo. That helped me come out with my own identity. As a result, there is a public debate about whether or not society accepts us.

She added, "So discussing queer matters critically means a lot".

Angel said, "Personally, social media is an important platform for me to uplift my activism and improvement. On the other hand, I face many difficulties on social media such as cyberbullying, hate speech and more". Jonisha said, "I use Facebook and YouTube more than Instagram and Twitter. It helps to reach people easily and share thoughts and stands on queer perspectives. It's a platform to allow replying against hate speech and fake news".

Thisanthini Thiruchelvam has been involved in queer activism since 2013. "Social media platforms like Facebook inform about events, movements, protests, and more related queer community than physical", she explained. "And it's creating networks among queer people and activists." She was an active individual who participated in activism in the North and

shares a majority of information on social media. A journalist and gender activist said, “Working as a female activist isn’t easy in Northern Sri Lanka. It is an extremely patriarchal place. As a result, women are underrepresented in the community. Attitudes don’t change overnight; we still have a long way to go, but in the Northern Province, the queer community and activists have made huge strides to overcome social stigma”. Social media platforms have long played an important role in activism. “And also, it’s important to bring the LGBTQA+ community together to achieve equality and awareness. Queer activism is driven by a few people here; the network should be extended even in virtual environments”, she adds.

Antonyclive Antonyseelan said,

Social media are important platforms to strengthen queer community and queer activism. Many queer people are not coming out. As a result, social media facilitates the collaboration of those individuals. Further, it’s a place to express their thoughts without fear, and it can reach many people at once. It’s a base for their empowerment.

Saji is a trans woman. She said,

Mostly, I use Facebook because it helps me share various content and posts on it. And I can see information such as laws, rights, ethics, and problems regarding queer people on Facebook. Social media is a great sphere for queer activism and empowerment, truly.

Pirainila Krishnarajah is an activist. She directed a documentary regarding issues faced by transgender people in 2016. She said,

Social media are the platforms for valuable discussions about the queer community, and they can reach people easily. In comparison to earlier times, the queer community has recently gained power. Social media are the main reason for their empowerment and their global network.

As the interviews show, the majority of queer activists and queer people use various social media platforms. At the same time, they have faced various forms of online violence.

Queer activism in Sri Lanka

There are crucial activist movements that take on the challenge of questioning centuries-old structures that prescribe hetero normativity. Many activists devote time to fighting homophobia. A huge conversation about love,

intimacy, romance, and pleasure had been framed within the queer world through feminist organizations, queer organizations, and activist groups in Sri Lanka. The formation of transgender communities in Sri Lanka in recent years has taken place on diverse terrain, as has queer activism in Sri Lanka.

Jaffna Pride Facebook page

Jaffna Pride is a movement, and they have a Facebook page only for Jaffna Pride updates. Jaffna Pride 2022 kicked off on May 31, 2022. The page publishes the entire program organized for Jaffna Pride 2022. People are invited to participate in the events through this page, such as a short film screening at American Corner Jaffna, a short-film competition (virtual), a photography competition (virtual), an art feast (community dinner), a pride panel discussion at American Corner, and a Jaffna Rainbow Pride walk around Jaffna town. Beautiful photographs of their events were also posted. This page gives us an idea about Jaffna Pride 2022 and the queer community. The most recent update occurred on August 31, 2022. They mentioned that the next updates will be for the Jaffna Pride of 2023.

The Jaffna Queer Festival

The Jaffna Queer Festival successfully created a new path for queer activism in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Karso Ponnuthurai is the founder of the Jaffna Queer Festival. He has achieved a milestone by celebrating queer identities in Jaffna. It was about celebrating queer identities within the Northern Province, especially in Jaffna. "I felt the need to create a space for the Tamil queer community, in particular, and raise awareness not only within the queer community but also in society", Karso said. Jaffna Queer Festival was initiated and celebrated in November 2021. The Jaffna Queer Festival 2022 was held in Kalam (a space for cultural encounters) from October 21 to 30. A 10-day program of discussions, seminars, workshops, film screenings, and field visits organized by Karso Ponnuthurai and curator Hari Rajalechumy. It was a queer-led and volunteer-run festival.

Queer ecology was the theme of the 2nd Jaffna Queer Festival in 2022, and it expressed the current socioeconomic status of the island. Karso mentioned that "I want to connect the festival to this land, the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, and the lives of the people in this land". The festival addresses the various challenges that are facing the queer community, such as violence, discrimination, exclusion, exploitation, harassment, cyberbullying, and more, in multiple contexts. Angel said, "Unknown people beyond our network contact us through social media". Someone from

Colombo and other countries participated in the Jaffna Queer Festival. This is the greater benefit of social media.

Impact through LGBTIQ+ activism and empowerment

This study also focuses on the notable impact created by queer communities and queer activists on social media platforms. Social media cultivates many opportunities for the LGBTIQ+ community and supports positive queer self-representation. It helps spread LGBT movements in Sri Lanka beyond the border. LGBTIQ+ people use social media to explore, conceal, protect, and express their identities. Queer people express themselves more honestly online than in real life. Most queer organizations, queer activists, and members of the LGBTIQ+ community use various social media platforms to inform about protests for their rights, movements, events, meetings, and other important days. Following COVID-19, social media is the most prominent platform for people to communicate and share information globally in Sri Lanka.

In recent times, social media has opened a platform where LGBTIQ+ people are free to express themselves openly and become self-made entrepreneurs, content creators, and influencers. A lesbian said Facebook helps her advertise her entrepreneurship. Most LGBTIQ+ people establish and promote their businesses on social media. Queer people and their enterprises move beyond geographical borders.

Social media participation by LGBTQ+ communities enhances the well-being and emotional support for queer communities. It provides valuable support, especially for those who experience exclusion from society. LGBTIQ+ community members have diverse hobbies, interests, and aspirations. They use various social media platforms to express their talents. TikTok has become a popular tool to capture and present creativity. Some queer people actively use TikTok to express their skills and creativity. A transwoman from Mannar district said that she “uses TikTok as an entertainment platform, and [] shares important messages through that and creates self-images”. Furthermore, a trans man from Jaffna district said that social media has helped him express his identity as a trans man to the world. Social media has provided a space for LGBTIQ+ individuals to develop their identities.

Sometimes LGBTIQ+ members face bullying and violence. Underrepresentation in society pushes them into depression and trauma. During this time, social media helps them overcome their problems. They can also share their feelings with other people on social media beyond the border. Many organizations work in Sri Lanka to support the queer community. One of the directors of an LGBTIQ+ organization said, “We maintain

social media platforms to connect with queer people all over Sri Lanka and help them if they are in trouble". She also said, "There are helplines introduced for queer people to solve their issues". Another said that "their organization collects donations through social media to support vulnerable members of the queer community".

Another transwoman from Vavuniya said that nowadays social media plays a prominent role in creating awareness about the LGBTIQ+ community. She said, "Also, social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok encourage us to express our talents in the fields of photography, dance, music, and other fields, and I have many followers on my social media platforms". People are educated by social media hashtags promoting queer movements. Furthermore, it is critical to the process of dispelling the myth that LGBTIQ+ people are submissive, passive, and voiceless in so-called society.

Negative impact of queer activism on social media

According to this study, many respondents said they faced negative representation on various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, and for their activism and day-to-day lives. They face homophobic and transphobic attacks, various forms of cyberbullying, and stereotyping on social media.

Homophobia and transphobia can be defined as the mentality of hatred and dislike toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other genders based on their culture, religion, law, and patriarchal ideology that are non-normative to the gender identity in Northern Province, Sri Lanka. It is mainly caused by a lack of understanding of sexualities and gender among people. An LGBT activist said that political homophobia is a weapon used against homosexual people to hide real issues on social media platforms in the digital era, and society still marginalizes the queer community. Many queer and non-queer activists have been doxed, and they have suffered social media mobs and even death threats.

Nowadays, there is more awareness about transgender people in North America and Sri Lanka than in earlier years. But digital platforms put transgender people in the spotlight. It gives a way to target and harass transgender people in cyberspace. Negative representation and comments affect the mental health of transgender people during their activism and daily lives. Online transphobia is a major issue in Sri Lanka due to digital technologies. Homophobia and transphobia are reflected through toxic language, hate speech, and other abuses used on social media platforms in northern Sri Lanka. Most of the queer people interviewed for the study said they have experienced homophobia and transphobia on various social

media platforms. As per the survey, Facebook is the main social media platform that disseminates homophobia and transphobia on a large scale.

Cyberbullying is a form of violence where people are bullied and harassed on new media platforms based on their gender, sex, religion, ethnicity, or any other social identity (HELVETAS Intercooperation, 2022). Cyberbullying manifests in society as homophobia and transphobia as well. Cyberstalking also happens on social media, harming the queer community and threatening them in Sri Lanka. Many LGBTIQ+ people hide their identity online and offline from the people around them, such as family members, friends, and relatives. Others have harassed queer people online. Social media's unglamorous side and cyberbullying affect LGBTIQ+ people, LGBT activism, and their socialization.

Most queer activists said that they avoid Facebook because of hate speech. They also receive many negative and toxic comments through Facebook Messenger. A queer activist said that queer issues are difficult and often involve the discussion of religion. "I face many forms of cyberbullying on social media. Someone blamed me and said, you are a curse to this society, and you are a queer person. That's why you speak for queer rights". A trans woman from Jaffna said that

most people like to use social media, especially Facebook, but there are limitations. If I upload or share anything, users or friends can view or share the posts, and I can receive feedback. But the view of society towards us (transgender people) is not good. If I write a post or upload a photo, some people who write comments will discourage me. Others will sympathize with me.

Most LGBTQA+ people and activists face more hate speech on Facebook than on other social media platforms.

A trans woman from Jaffna said that "social media platforms are coming forward to allow the expression of transgender people's talents". Furthermore, activists feel that if they talk about transgender people and their challenges, the popularity of their media will increase. Because of that, many social media platforms and media organizations talk about queer issues.

Furthermore, another trans man said, "[T]hey exposed me as 'trans' without my permission". He mentioned, "When I happily upload a profile picture, more people mock me in their comments. That's why I feel very sad and worry about using or starting to use social media". On social media, discriminatory and abusive comments, as well as widespread ignorance and underrepresentation of LGBTIQ+ communities were observed.

According to the study, more people are not aware of digital security, and they are using public Wi-Fi. Doxing involves exposing sensitive information on social media. Hackers use doxing to harass, threaten, or get revenge on queer people during their activism too. Doxing is a popular tool in culture wars. Many queer and non-queer activists have been doxed, and they have suffered social media mobs and even death threats. Social media doxing involves the collection of personal information about queer people from your social media accounts. They collect the location, place of work, friends, photos, likes, and dislikes, places visited, the names of family members and pets, and more. They use those details to create fake profiles and reveal unwanted information about a particular person. Furthermore, many members of the LGBTIQ+ community do not like to express their personal information, but through doxing, confidential information about queer people is revealed on social media platforms.

LGBT activists said they also face cyberbullying on social media. Most LGBTIQ+ people feel uncomfortable on social media. An LGBT activist said that “compared with other Asian countries, I have never seen any trans people beg on the street or go for sex work”. LGBTIQ+ people in Sri Lanka are doing diverse jobs such as modeling, beauty culture, artists, medical professionals, academics, entrepreneurship, business, and more, and exposing that on social media proudly. “I can see this with pride”.

An activist said, “Most of the people in Sri Lanka do not have even basic knowledge about homosexuality”. There is no proper sex education system in the country. Sri Lankan history and many religions practiced in Sri Lanka also misguide the public and religious communities. They believe homosexuality and bisexuality are against their religion and culture. Due to that, people grow up without accurate information and knowledge about different sexualities and genders in the world. This instills hatred and intolerance in the LGBTIQ+ community. Intolerance of alternative sexualities is the main reason for the online underrepresentation of LGBTIQ+ communities in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Homophobic attacks are common in Sri Lanka, and they are visible on social media platforms such as Facebook pages, and Twitter. Homophobic people leave derogatory and filthy comments on queer-related social media posts and content.

Queer people experience psychological abuse on social media. It creates trauma and emotional problems that affect their social lives as well as their mental health. A queer person said, “After my Advanced Levels, my school friends created one social media group through WhatsApp, and they questioned my identity. That emotionally or psychologically affected me”. Furthermore, many queer people discussed that they face a huge amount of psychological abuse on various social media platforms. A gay man was the

victim of false charges made through a fake video on social media that had gone viral. That incident traumatized him and limited his activities.

On social media, transgender and other queer people experience verbal abuse. People mock them and call them derogatory names like “butterfly”, “toffee”, “nine”, and many other names in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the negative aspect of social media is often showcased in the negative comments under the posts. “People should understand us, and then only their approach will change”, said one activist. Most of the respondents said that they face verbal harassment on various social media platforms, but Facebook is the platform that spreads hate the most.

Most LGBTIQ+ individuals and activists have experienced sexually explicit image-based abuse in Sri Lanka. This has produced feelings of social anxiety and social isolation among the survivors, besides damaging their social relationships. Also, someone lost their job due to image-based violence. Trolling LGBT activists is also a major issue in Sri Lanka. Many activists have stated that “the patriarchal mentality treats them like that”, which limits their activism and personal lives. Trolls make random and controversial comments or posts to provoke negative reactions from the readers of the specific comment or post. When people speculate about someone’s gender identity and/or sexual orientation, they create harmful stereotypes based on the idea that all queer people must present themselves in a certain way. A trans woman stated that “social media portrays us as goddesses, sometimes distinguishing us from humans; there is no need to portray us as goddesses or anything new. Please try to represent us as humans”. In Jaffna, the power of patriarchy still dominates the daily lives of LGBTIQ+ people.

Conclusion

The chapter indicates that the activism and exposure of the LGBTQIA+ community through social media was observed at high levels and had many positive impacts on society. Organizations and movements arose to bring them to the attention of society. LGBTQIA+ activists face challenges on social media while carrying out their activism,

Sri Lanka is a patriarchal country. The Northern Province is also a cultural place with colonial ideas. Homosexuality is not accepted by a majority of the community. Transgender people are accepted by the northern community to some extent. According to the study, this also reflects the parochial mentality of the people in this area. Most probably, LGBTIQ+ people face challenges on social media, and the cyberviolence they face through social media impacts their lives in a cruel manner. Psychological abuse, verbal harassment, bullying, mobbing, cyber harassment, sexual exploitation, sexual assaults, revenge porn, trolling, and identity theft are

faced by queer people via social media in Northern Province, Sri Lanka. The number of negative portrayals, cultural discrimination, and prejudice against gender minorities displayed in social media is staggering. People mock them and call them derogatory names. Most of the interviewees have been bullied virtually and threatened via social media. Even though the majority of them use social media to empower themselves and engage in activism, they have achieved some level of acceptance through their activism.

Social media platforms enhance the well-being and health care of queer people; provide jobs, education, and other opportunities; and connect them with peers. Social media, in particular, connects queer people across borders. As much as these platforms bring many benefits, they also have flaws. Many members of the LGBTIQ+ community have overcome various challenges and come out with their identities. Social media has created a sphere for queer people to share, help, communicate beyond borders and get counseling. Empowering queer people is not an easy task, but queer organizations, queer activists, queer people, and other people and organizations working for social justice, equality, and human rights have all together achieved a part of their goals in a short period through their social media activism.

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