Social Media Influence on Sri Lankan Young Adults’ Sense of Self-Expression

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This qualitative study examines how self-expression and creativity in Sri Lankan young adults is influenced by social media or social networking sites (SNS) on four aspects: types of SNS chosen for expression; how the chosen types encourage self-expression; on-line vs off-line world and how the Westernised concept of ‘expressing oneself’ is addressed in a collectivist culture. Using a convenient sample, 10 in-depth interviews with young adults were obtained, and through thematic analysis, two main themes: 1) self-expression for development of self and 2) self-expression in relation to others were identified. The first theme examines how SNS influences identity construction and how young adults satisfy their need to belong through SNS. It further explores how the relevancy of a SNS impacts self-expression and how “storytelling” or the way in which life’s moments are captured and displayed to the wider society is done through SNS. The second theme explores how SNS enhances the image that an individual is trying to portray himself/herself to the outside world; and how it provides an avenue for young adults to create a voice for themselves. It also explores how the Sri Lankan culture affects young adults’ creativity and understanding of the term ‘self-expression’ itself. Findings from this study provide an understanding of the behaviour patterns displayed, the increasing importance of SNS in defining a person’s identity, and the way all this is viewed through the scope of a collectivist culture. The study provides insights for future investigations and interventions related to practices of young adults on SNS.

Keywords: Self-expression, Social Media, Sri Lanka, Young Adults