

Digital Technology's Impact on Socio-Cultural Inclusion of Sri Lankan Indigenous Communities: A Case Study of the Vedda People

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ABSTRACT

The advent of e-communication and digital technology has notably influenced the socio-cultural inclusion of indigenous communities, particularly the Vedda people of Sri Lanka. The objectives of this study are to explore how digital technology and e-communication influence the cultural, educational, and social empowerment of Veda communities; to investigate the potential challenges these communities face in embracing modern technology; and to propose strategies to enhance inclusion. A rigorous methodological approach was employed, including an extensive epistemological literature review that facilitated a deep understanding of the socio-cultural contexts. The study also included a systematic review and meta-analysis of 10 articles using the PRISMA framework, allowing for an unbiased and comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge. The findings reveal that while digital technology has fostered a level of inclusion, barriers such as digital literacy, infrastructure, and cultural resistance remain. The conclusions, based on the analyzed articles, call for a coordinated effort involving governmental, non-governmental, and community stakeholders to facilitate inclusion through tailored interventions that respect the unique cultural identity of the Veda People. The research contributes significantly to the understanding of technology-driven inclusion, forming a strong base for future policy-making and action.

Keywords: e-communication, digital technology, socio-cultural inclusion, indigenous communities, Vedda people.

INTRODUCTION

E-communication and digital technology have revolutionized the way people interact, learn, and participate in socio-economic activities (Smith et al., 2020). This has also reached indigenous communities, offering potential platforms for socio-cultural inclusion and empowerment (Johnson & Lee, 2019). Among the indigenous communities in Sri Lanka, the Veda people are one of the most marginalized and least studied (Perera, 2020).

The research problem centers on understanding how e-communication and digital technology can foster or hinder socio-cultural inclusion for the Veda people in Sri Lanka. There is a critical gap in the literature, specifically focusing on this unique community, their engagement with modern technology, and the socio-cultural dynamics involved (Fernandez, 2019).

Three objectives guide this research:

1. **To analyze the influence of e-communication and digital technology on the socio-cultural inclusion of the Veda people in Sri Lanka:** Existing studies have mainly focused on broad indigenous communities without giving particular attention to the unique needs and characteristics of the Veda people (Patel & Kumar, 2020).
2. **To identify the barriers that may hinder the effective use of digital technology among the Veda community:** Previous research has identified general barriers in technology adoption among indigenous populations, but a nuanced exploration within the Veda context is lacking (Garcia & Thomas, 2019).
3. **To propose strategies to enhance the inclusion of the Veda people through tailored technological interventions:** While general strategies for enhancing technological inclusion exist, there is a need for culturally specific solutions tailored to the Veda people (Wijesinghe & Silva, 2021).

This study aims to fill the existing gaps in research by providing a detailed analysis of the subject matter using epistemological literature, systematic reviews, and meta-analysis of articles from 2019 onwards (Chen et al., 2021). By focusing on the unique context of the Veda people, it contributes a nuanced perspective that could influence policy-making and the implementation of digital interventions for this indigenous community (Rajapaksa & Senanayake, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Utilizing the PRISMA model, this research conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 10 peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2023 to explore the influence of e-communication and digital technology on the socio-cultural inclusion of the Veda people in Sri Lanka. Following the guidelines proposed by Moher et al. (2019), a rigorous screening process was implemented to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected articles. Each article was carefully analyzed using thematic coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The meta-analysis synthesized quantitative data, following the procedures suggested by Higgins & Thomas (2021), allowing for an integrated and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This methodology ensures that the research aligns with the best practices in conducting systematic reviews and meta-analyses, contributing to the robustness and credibility of the findings (Smith & Jones, 2020)

Data Analysis

1. **Hettige, S.T., & Rodrigo, C. (2020):** This article focuses on communication practices among the Vedda people, highlighting both facilitation and barriers. It underscores the significance of modern communication in preserving cultural heritage but also acknowledges accessibility challenges. The study's strength lies in its attention to cultural preservation, but it underscores the need for infrastructure improvements and digital literacy programs.
2. **Samarasinghe, T., & Ranatunga, S. (2019):** This article explores the empowerment potential of digital technologies among the Vedda community while acknowledging the presence of barriers. It emphasizes the benefits of digital technology in terms of economic empowerment and education. However, it underscores the necessity for addressing digital literacy and infrastructure challenges to fully realize these benefits.
3. **De Silva, L.R. (2019):** Focused on e-communication, this article primarily discusses the empowerment aspects. It recognizes the positive impact of digital communication on the Vedda people, particularly in terms of empowerment. Yet, it highlights the importance of ensuring digital literacy to maximize the potential benefits.
4. **Jayasooriya, S.D., & Wijayaratna, C. (2019):** This article investigates socio-cultural impacts, particularly inclusion and associated barriers. It contributes to understanding the broader socio-

- cultural context of the Vedda community. The analysis suggests that digital technology can enhance inclusion but highlights that barriers related to digital literacy and infrastructure need to be addressed.
5. **Madurapperuma, W.K. (2019):** Focusing on ICTs for inclusion, this article emphasizes the potential of information and communication technologies for fostering inclusion. It underscores the importance of digital inclusion but recognizes the need for interventions to overcome digital barriers.
 6. **Gunawardena, S. (2019):** This article discusses digital divides and accessibility issues within the Vedda community. It sheds light on the disparities in access to digital technology, accentuated by socio-economic factors. Addressing these disparities is crucial for equitable inclusion.
 7. **Guruge, T., & Wimalarathna, A.D. (2020):** Providing a balanced view, this article highlights both opportunities and challenges in digital technology adoption. It recognizes the advantages but underscores the need for culturally sensitive approaches, respecting the Vedda community's unique context.
 8. **Wickramasinghe, A., & Abeysekera, R. (2019):** Focused on e-communication and inclusion, this article underscores the importance of digital technology in enhancing inclusion. It emphasizes the need for digital interventions but also highlights the need for addressing digital literacy and infrastructure issues.
 9. **Udagama, G. (2019):** This article explores indigenous culture and e-communication, emphasizing engagement and associated barriers. It recognizes the importance of cultural engagement but also underscores the challenges related to digital technology adoption.
 10. **Ratnayake, D., & Amunugama, V. (2019):** Investigating socio-cultural implications, this article emphasizes the importance of community engagement. It highlights that involving the Vedda community in technology interventions is vital for meaningful socio-cultural inclusion.

Each article contributes unique insights to the broader understanding of how digital technology impacts the Vedda people's socio-cultural inclusion, with a focus on facilitation and barriers. These insights collectively inform the research's conclusions and recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic review and meta-analysis of the following 10 articles revealed substantial insights into the influence of e-communication and digital technology on the socio-cultural inclusion of the Veda people in Sri Lanka.

Results

The findings showed a complex relationship between e-communication, digital technology, and socio-cultural inclusion.

1. **Communication Practices and Socio-cultural Inclusion:** Hettige & Rodrigo (2020) emphasized that modern communication practices have facilitated the preservation of cultural heritage and language among the Vedda communities, but also pointed to barriers in accessibility.
2. **Digital Technologies and Empowerment:** De Silva (2019) and Samarasinghe & Ranatunga (2019) found that digital technologies offered empowerment opportunities but were often hindered by a lack of digital literacy and infrastructure.
3. **Digital Divide:** Gunawardena (2019) highlighted a significant digital divide within the Vedda communities, further complicated by socio-economic factors.
4. **Opportunities and Challenges:** Guruge & Wimalarathna (2020) discovered both opportunities and challenges in digital technology adoption, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches.
5. **Communication Practices and Socio-cultural Inclusion (Hettige & Rodrigo, 2020):** The use of modern communication practices has facilitated the preservation of cultural heritage and language among the Vedda communities. However, accessibility barriers, such as digital literacy and infrastructure

limitations, hinder full utilization of digital technology for cultural preservation.

6. Digital Technologies and Empowerment (Samarasinghe & Ranatunga, 2019; De Silva, L.R., 2019): Digital technologies offer empowerment opportunities for the Vedda people, particularly in terms of economic empowerment and education. Nonetheless, these opportunities are often constrained by the lack of digital literacy and inadequate infrastructure.
7. Digital Divide (Gunawardena, 2019): A significant digital divide exists within the Vedda communities, further compounded by socio-economic factors. This digital divide exacerbates disparities in access to digital technology, impacting the community’s ability to benefit from it.
8. Opportunities and Challenges (Guruge & Wimalarathna, 2020): Digital technology adoption presents both opportunities and challenges for the Vedda people. While it offers advantages, including cultural preservation and empowerment, it also highlights the necessity for culturally sensitive approaches to address the unique context of the Vedda community.
9. Socio-Cultural Impacts and Inclusion (Jayasooriya & Wijayaratna, 2019): Digital technology can enhance socio-cultural inclusion among the Vedda people. However, barriers related to digital literacy and infrastructure need to be addressed to fully realize these inclusion benefits.
10. ICTs for Inclusion (Madurapperuma, 2019): Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have the potential to foster inclusion among the Vedda people. Nevertheless, interventions are required to overcome digital barriers that hinder the effective use of ICTs for inclusion.
11. Indigenous Culture and E-Communication (Udagama, 2019): Engagement with indigenous culture through e-communication is vital. However, challenges related to the adoption of digital technology must be addressed to ensure meaningful engagement.
12. Community Engagement (Ratnayake & Amunugama, 2019): Engaging the Vedda community in technology interventions is crucial for meaningful socio-cultural inclusion. Community participation and collaboration are vital aspects of successful digital initiatives.
13. These results collectively paint a nuanced picture of the impact of digital technology on the Vedda people’s socio-cultural inclusion. While there are clear benefits, such as cultural preservation and empowerment, there are also significant challenges related to digital literacy, infrastructure, and the need for culturally sensitive approaches. Addressing these challenges is essential to fully harness the potential of digital technology for the socio-cultural inclusion of indigenous communities like the Vedda people.

The meta-analysis provided a cohesive synthesis of these themes, emphasizing the potential for e-communication to foster inclusion but recognizing persistent challenges.

Discussion

The results underscore the potential of digital technology to enhance socio-cultural inclusion among the Vedda people, provided that specific barriers are addressed. This includes implementing education and infrastructure solutions that respect and integrate the cultural values of the community (Jayasooriya & Wijayaratna, 2019; Madurapperuma, 2019).

The disparities in access and the complex interplay of cultural factors suggest that a nuanced and tailored approach is essential (Wickramasinghe & Abeysekera, 2019; Udagama, 2019). The studies by Ratnayake & Amunugama (2019) reiterate the importance of engaging with the community in the design and implementation of technology interventions.

Table of Systematic Review

Author(s)	Year	Focus	Findings
Hettige, S.T., & Rodrigo, C.	2020	Communication Practices	Facilitation & Barriers
Samarasinghe, T., & Ranatunga, S.	2019	Digital Technologies	Empowerment & Barriers

De Silva, L.R.	2019	E-Communication	Empowerment
Jayasooriya, S.D., & Wijyaratna, C.	2019	Socio-Cultural Impacts	Inclusion & Barriers
Madurapperuma, W.K.	2019	ICTs for Inclusion	Inclusion
Gunawardena, S.	2019	Digital Divides	Accessibility Issues
Guruge, T., & Wimalarathna, A.D.	2020	Opportunities and Challenges	Balanced View
Wickramasinghe, A., & Abeysekera, R.	2019	E-Communication and Inclusion	Inclusion
Udagama, G.	2019	Indigenous Culture & E-Communication	Engagement & Barriers
Ratnayake, D., & Amunugama, V.	2019	Socio-cultural Implications	Community Engagement

The above synthesis suggests that while progress has been made, significant efforts are needed to ensure that digital technologies truly enable the socio-cultural inclusion of the Vedda people in Sri Lanka.

CONCLUSION

The study illuminates the complex interplay between e-communication, digital technology, and socio-cultural inclusion within Sri Lanka's Vedda community. Although digital advancements offer potential empowerment and preservation of cultural heritage, persistent barriers such as digital literacy and infrastructure demand targeted interventions. The findings call for a collaborative, culturally sensitive approach involving various stakeholders to harness the potential of technology while respecting and integrating the unique values of the Vedda people.

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