



Political Cartoon, Facebook Community and Formation of Public Opinion in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

As a developing country, Sri Lanka faces a different economic, social, political crisis. When the citizens are suffering from different issues, there are different ways they use to express them to the government. Therefore, media is the most powerful tool, plays a vital role in bridging the communications between citizens and governments. Jurgan Habermas (1991) explains the importance of having a public sphere in forming public opinion. Therefore, the research identifies Facebook cartoon communities as an effective way of creating public opinion. Facebook communities use both printed medias cartoons as well as web cartoons. Creative cartoons draw pictures to enhance the awareness of important incidents to get the public's attention. It has been believed that pictures speak louder than words. Therefore, regardless the age, education, people get informed by cartoons. This research aimed to investigate how cartoons transform messages to the public and how it affects public opinion. The qualitative research methodology used in this research and the major data collecting tools were participant observation and unstructured interviews. The research conducted as a web-based research and therefore the primary data collected via Facebook Social Media's Cartoon community. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The research findings revealed that the cartoons' main purpose was to send a message blended with sarcasm, allowing people to resonate with their experiences and existing knowledge they have. Further, the results revealed that the Facebook community allows people to communicate on different issues, share them on their Facebook page and build conversations with their friends' circle and discuss further on that. Interestingly, they tend to predict and forecast future political trends. Moreover, Facebook cartoon communities act as a new public sphere, which opens new ventures for both members and non-members to develop discussion on current issues. Ultimately this has led to create public opinion in the society in different issues.

Keywords: *Political Cartoons, Political Communication Political Culture, Public Opinion, Public Sphere*