

# Faces On Facebook: Associated Factors In Choosing The Facebook Profile Picture By Young Adults In SLIATE

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**Abstract:** This is a preliminary study which focuses on Facebook profile picture from two different perspectives; selection and substitution. It attempt to identify & evaluate the related variables that has an impact on profile picture selection. Participants include 309 male and female Facebook users between the ages of 18 to 34 who are enrolled in a higher education institute in Sri Lanka. The analysis finds that profile picture categories differ according to gender. Majority of the males prefer to use their own close up photo while female equally like to use their own close up photo or a photo of a celebrity. Profile picture category did not significantly vary by age, perhaps because of less variation in the age group considered. But it depends on the appearance Facebook user is trying to convey through the profile picture. The individuals who post their own close up photos believe that they appear attractive. The individuals who feel that they look happy are uploading photos with their friends mostly. Most of the individuals change their profile picture when they find a better picture. Reason for changing the profile picture vary according to the age. The males believe they can build an impression about themselves through the profile picture whilst the females' respond is neutral. Implications of these findings, as well as suggestions for future research, are discussed.

**Key words:** Social Media, Facebook, Profile Picture, Factors

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The social network is a modern concept where people in different cadres and areas can socialize with diverse interests and backgrounds in the fast moving busy world. Among many SNS such as Twitter, Flickr, Myspace, Google+, Linkeldn etc. Facebook is the second most popular SNS. Facebook is functioning with a mission of "give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected." According to statistics they are successfully fulfilling their mission by having 1,280,000,000 users as at on June 2014 (List of Social Networking Websites, 2014). Among Facebook users in Sri Lanka larger portion is young adults of age 18 to 24. They are 41.5% of the total Facebook population in Sri Lanka. (Sri Lanka Facebook Statistics, 2014) For young generation Facebook is a virtual social gathering where they meet countless friends which they cannot imagine otherwise. A popular daily newspaper 'Ceylon Today' states that 78% of Sri Lankan youth spend over 46 minutes a day on Facebook. (Ceylon Today, 2012). It is their digital album, their digital diary and their online playroom. Facebook is changing the way young generation interact with one another online. They are moving away from face to face interactions and Facebook features such as status update, comments, and tagging, interactive albums facilitates interactions and communication. When interacting with others the way we present ourselves has a great impact on relationship building. In the Facebook phenomenon the profile picture present one's self to the thousands of friends out there.

Other than the name, profile picture is the only entity users could see when browsing through Facebook private profiles. So it provides the first impression Facebook users make on other users viewing their profiles. The image people choose to share on Facebook can provide insight to their personalities, interests & social lives. For the Facebook users the profile picture is the entry point to their online social life. So a certain amount of thought is spent in choosing a profile picture. The present study focuses on identifying the factors influencing to change the profile picture. The objectives of this study are

- To identify the factors which influence the selection of profile picture
- To identify the factors that influence the user's decision of changing the profile picture

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

When examining the factors that affect the use of Facebook profile picture, existing research has employed different notions such as age and gender (Strano, 2008) (Hum & Chamberlin, 2011) (Siibak, 2009). Culture is a main component in deciding a profile picture. This fact is emphasized by the research done based on two social networking sites Facebook and Renren. The results reveals that Chinese users tend to customize their profile photos than American users do. Nevertheless, American users tend to present profile photos that contain more people, contradicting the "western individualism, eastern-collectivism" theory. (Chen Zhao, 2011) Relationship status is an aspect on choosing a profile picture. Unmarried users may post attractive photos to find a partner, married users may post family photos to show the bond and affectionate between family members. (Kalvin Alpizar, 2012) Although many researches emphasized on these factors there was hardly any research on relating these factors to the type of profile picture used. Therefore, the present study focuses on identifying the factors associated with the use of profile pictures and then identifying a relationship between those factors and the profile pictures, in the Sri Lankan context. Analyzing further it became evident that several factors influence the user for the decision of changing the profile picture. (Strano, 2008). It can be internal such as the desire to present an attractive image or it can be

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due to the influence of external factors. Asians are strongly attached to their community and it may be reflected in their online behavior as well. Review of literature results in a conceptual framework shown in Fig 1. The modal hypothesize that personal factors, social factors and technological factors are antecedents for choosing and changing profile picture.

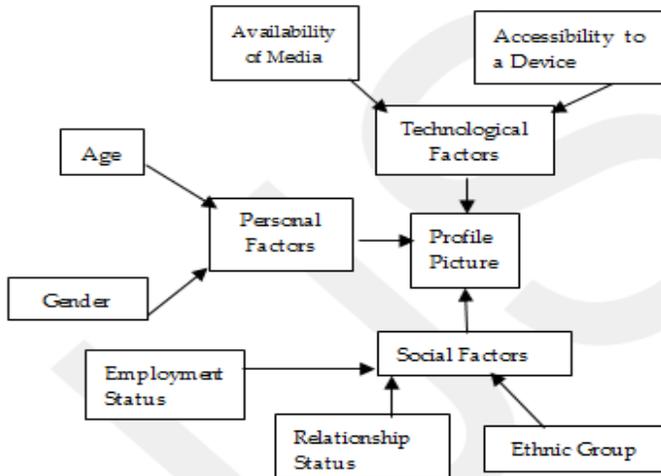


Fig 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

**3 METHOD**

**3.1 Participants**

The target population consist of individuals following a diploma from SLIATE and by number there are 15294 individuals as at 2014 academic year. They are from any of the twelve institutes spread island wide and are from different disciplines such as management, engineering, agriculture , English ,etc. The minimum education level of the individuals is G.C.E. (A/L) and their medium of study is English. The appropriate number of participants for the study was determined using Krejcie and Morgan Table. The required sample size is 375 with 95% confidence and ±5% margin of error. The characteristics of respondents is presented in Table 1. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 44 years, with an overall mean age of 22. Female participants (n = 185) outnumbered male participants (n = 124). Sinhalese (n = 216) comprised the largest ethnic group, followed by Tamils (n = 49), and Muslims (n=42). In terms of employment status, a majority (71%) of the respondents are unemployed.

TABLE 1: STATISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Measure	Characteristic	frequency	percentage
Gender	Male	124	40.1 %
	Female	185	59.9 %
Age	18 – 24	250	80.9 %
	25 – 34	57	18.4 %
	35 – 44	02	0.6 %
Ethnic group	Sinhalese	216	69.9 %
	Tamil	49	15.9 %
	Muslim	42	13.6 %
	Burgher	01	0.3 %
Relationship status	Single	235	76.1 %
	Married	15	4.9%
	In a relationship	57	18.4 %
Employment status	Employed full time	60	19.4 %
	Employed part time	17	5.5 %
	Self employed	05	1.6 %
	Unemployed	219	70.9 %

**3.2 Sampling Design**

The stratified sampling and simple random sampling had been used to select the sampling units. The individuals of the population is divided into homogenous subgroups based on their gender, institute and the course followed. Proportionate allocation strategy had been adhered in which number of individuals in each strata is proportional to the total population. Simple random sampling had been used to select the individuals from each stratum. An independent party in each institute collect the registration numbers of the students who have Facebook accounts. Random number picker tool is used to select numbers for each group.

**3.3 Materials and Procedure**

Data was collected by means of self-administered questionnaire. The rationale for choosing this method was increasing the response rate from highly distributed group of respondents and letting the respondents answer at their convenience. The survey instrument was divided into three sections. Section One: Availability and accessibility of media, items 1-5,12 focuses on the life time of the Facebook profile , the frequency of access and the media used for taking profile pictures. Section two: profile picture summery, items 1-11examines the respondents’ willingness to post a profile picture and the reasons for not so. Item 6-7 captures the type of profile picture if the profile picture is available. Items 8, 11, 13 measures the respondent’s perception of impression building through profile picture. The survey items were developed by review of literature and by an analysis of profile pictures of researchers’ friend list in the Facebook. Section three: demographic information. Items 14-22 obtained respondent’s demographic information such as age, gender, marital status, area of living and area of study. A pilot test had been carried out with 05 students in the researcher’s institute. After a focus group discussion with them the questionnaire was modified and finalized. An independent party in each institute collected the registration numbers of the students who have Facebook account. They fed the numbers to a random number picker tool to select numbers for each group. The student participation was volunteer and verbal consent has been taken before distributing the questionnaire. The printed questionnaire was distributed among the selected students and 10 minutes was given for answering.

**4 RESULTS**

**4.1 Descriptive Analysis**

Most of the individuals are having the Facebook account for more than four years. It is 82% of the sample. Majority of the individuals access Facebook when they get a chance. 8% of the individuals keep logged into Facebook whole day. Most tend to access Facebook at home or through their mobile phone. 60% use broadband services as the most frequent internet connection method while pre-paid internet connections are used least frequently. 65% take photographs by a smart phone and they very seldom use tablets to take photos. More than half of the sample use individual profile pictures and out of them 48% put their own close up photos. Least percentage put a photo of a closet person. 20% prefer to have their own full body photo or a photo of a celebrity. About 2% of the individuals have a photo of a baby and all those individuals are female.

**TABLE 2: CROSS TABULATION OF GROUP PROFILE PICTURE & MOST PREFERRED APPEARANCE**

		Most preferred Appearance		Total
		Happy		
PP Group	It is a photo with my friends	Count	7	7
		% within Most preferred Appearance	77.8%	77.8%
	Other	Count	1	1
		% within Most preferred Appearance	11.1%	11.1%
	99	Count	1	1
		% within Most preferred Appearance	11.1%	11.1%
Total		Count	9	9
		% within Most preferred Appearance	100.0%	100.0%

According to Table 2, 77.8% of the individuals who feels that they look happy are uploading photos with their friends as the profile picture.

**4.2 Chi Square test of independence**

Most of the individuals change their profile picture when they find a better picture; i.e. 43% of the whole sample. 35% change the profile picture when the feel that it is there for too long. Only 2% change the picture to show an event they have took part. One has stated that he is changing the picture to show his attitudes and another 2% have never changed their profile picture. 58% believes that they can build an impression about themselves through the profile picture, whereas 35% are there who are opposed to that claim. There are far too many variables to analyze the effect of the variables with the profile picture category. So the current research primarily focused on each variable individually and the association between the profile picture category and the variables were studied. In the description of the results below, a significant level of 0.05 was considered. Respondents' willingness to post a profile picture is independent of the number of years he/she maintains the Facebook account,  $\chi^2(4) = 0.843$ . There was no association between internet accessing method and the frequency of accessing the Facebook account,  $\chi^2(9) = 0.064$ .

**TABLE 3: INDEPENDENT SAMPLE T TEST OF IMPRESSION BUILDING**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper

NoOfP P	Equal variances assumed	.589	.444	.954	218	.341	1.436	1.505	-1.530	4.401
	Equal variances not assumed			.953	161.159	.342	1.436	1.506	-1.539	4.410

According to Table 3, there is no significance difference between average number of profile pictures uploaded by individuals who believe that profile picture builds an impression and those who don't believe that profile picture builds an impression. There is no association between the technological factors identified in the conceptual framework, and the category of profile picture. There is no significance influence on availability of media,  $(\chi^2(12) = 0.081)$  nor accessibility of media,  $(\chi^2(12) = 0.217)$ , on the profile picture category. When considering the personal factors gender has an impact on the profile picture category while the results indicate age does not have an impact for the above mentioned. Chi square test of independence was calculated comparing the profile picture categories of male and female. A significant interaction was found,  $(\chi^2(4) = 0.000)$ . Male were more likely to use their own close up photo (53.3%) while female equally like to use their own close up photo (14.6%) or a photo of a celebrity (14.1%). Ethnic group, relationship status, employment status was treated as social factors. According to the current study neither of them had an impact on profile picture category with the associated chi square statistics 0.127, 0.554, 0.987 respectively.

**5 DISCUSSION**

The factors age, gender, ethnic group, relationship status, employment status were tested against profile picture category. By the findings it can be stated that there is a relationship between the profile picture category and the gender. Male and female both prefer to upload their own individual photos as the profile picture. But majority of the males prefer to use their own close up photo (53.3%) while female equally like to use their own close up photo (14.6%) or a photo of a celebrity (14.1%). Further results states that profile picture category doesn't have an association with the following factors.

**Age**

The previous studies revealed that there is an association between age and the type of profile picture. (Strano, 2008) But the results of the current study differ may be due to less variation in the age group selected.

**Ethnic group**

There is no relationship between the ethnic group and the profile picture category. This contradicts with the common belief of society; the Muslim girls remain backward in the society so they hardly publish their photos in the online environment. There was a poor possibility of further analysing the effect of ethnic group as Sinhalese dominated the sample with a 69.9%. About half of the Sinhalese students use Individual photos as their profile picture.

### Relationship Status

Considered only three relationship categories; Single, In a relationship and Married. Only 23% represented the married and in a relationship categories which is a less percentage compared to single category. So could not perform a detailed analysis related to relationship status. A previous study (Kalvin Alpizar, 2012) has revealed that individuals who are in a relationship post pictures of themselves habitually.

### Employment Status

Unemployed is the majority; with a percentage of 70.9%. Individual profile picture category is popular among them. The Category of profile picture is dependent on the appearance Facebook user is trying to convey through the profile picture. The individuals who posts their own close up photos believe that they appear attractive. This complies with the findings of Eileen et al where the researchers suggests that more narcissistic adolescents select profile photos which are indeed physically appealing to self-present on Facebook. (Eileen, 2011)The close up photo enables the individual to express themselves facially and they can present themselves in a better, unequivocal manner. The individuals who feels that they look happy are uploading photos with their friends as the profile picture which supports the eastern-collectivism theory. Most of the individuals change their profile picture when they find a better picture. Reason for changing the profile picture vary according to the age and the appearance the individual is trying to convey through the profile picture. The individuals in the age group 18 to 24 change their profile picture when they get a better picture. The individuals in the age group 25 to 34 change their profile picture when they feel it was there for too long whilst the eldest group (35 to 44) change the picture because of comments. There is a gender variation in believing that impression can be built through the profile picture. Majority of the male (74.1%) believe you can build an impression through the profile picture. But among females believing and not believing ratio is 1:1.

### 6 CONCLUSION

This is a preliminary study that tried to investigate different aspects related to choosing a Facebook profile pictures among the adolescent community in Sri Lanka. The decision of choosing a profile picture and the belief that Facebook profile picture build an impression depends on the gender of the individual. The reason of changing the profile picture may vary according to the age of the person. The appearance the individual is trying to convey the profile picture has a high impact on the type of profile picture he/she selects. As with all research certain limitations present. When analyzing the factors associated with Facebook profile picture the behavioral factors (e.g.: self-esteem, narcissism) has been ignored. The study was limited to students in SLIATE but expanding the target group may help to get a better idea about young adults in Sri Lanka. This study's findings offer a variety of further research ideas. For example future research may incorporate more diversified sample which represent the all the young adults in the country. Examining a more representative sample on ethnic groups, employment and relationship groups will extend and expand the findings. This study can be used as a base for future studies related to sociological research related to social media.

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