

# Challenges of digital-age politics

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# Politics = Conversation

- Politics = a conversation leading to a decision on matters affecting all or many of the members of a unit of rule (the country, a province, a city, or even an organization or an association)

## **In an effective conversation**

- One must gain and hold the attention of the other or others
- If objective is a decision that all can live with, others must also have an opportunity to speak & be listened to
- Procedure for reaching a decision
- Not all need speak
- Some may speak for others
- ...

# Conversation of 21 million?

- **Representative democracy?**
  - Really?
  - Can we select (& hold accountable) our representatives without conversations?
  - Can representative democracy work without broader, continuing conversations that involve stakeholders & public?
  - **→ Media**

# Media failing?

- Fractured audience → People not attending to same messages/ conversations
  - Proliferating TV channels: **9 in 2006 → 25 in 2015**
  - FM stations doubled from **21 in 2006 to 53 in 2015**
  - Young people getting their news solely from social media
    - Some Facebook groups have members in the thousands
    - News being shared in large Whatsapp & Viber groups
- “A lie can run round the world before the truth has got its boots on.” Being confirmed by systematic research
- Manipulation using psychographics . . .

## Top 5 Facebook groups w Lanka as keyword

ශ්‍රී ලංකා ක්‍රිකට් කොල්ලෝ සහ කෙල්ලෝ Lanka Cricket Boys & Girls)  
519,246 Members

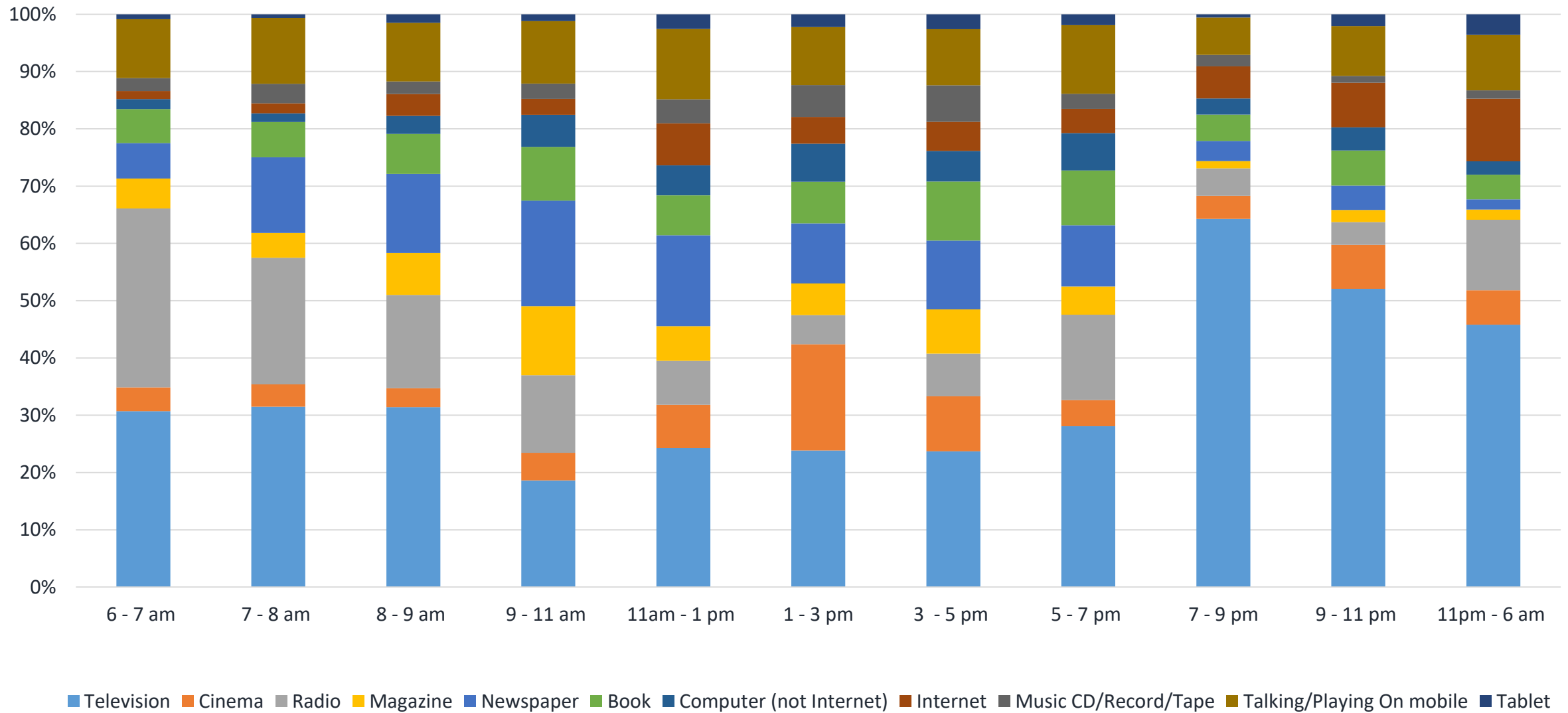
Lanka facebook  
367,669 Members

Bike Home  
343,527 Members

Lions Cricket[ක්‍රිකට් පිස්සන්ටයි]  
244,563 Members

SL PC Gamers | පරිගණක ක්‍රීඩා  
201,185 Members

# Time allocated to media by a typical Sri Lankan..



# Sri Lanka as political laboratory: Sample outcomes in pre-digital “golden age”

- Sinhala Only legislation and failure to make acceptable provisions for Tamil, 1956
- Riots across the country, 1958
- Assassination of a Prime Minister, 1959
- Adoption of lunar calendar with variable work weeks disconnected from the world, 1965-70
- First insurrection, 1971
- Constitution making without consent of minorities, laying ground for civil conflict, 1971-72
- Malnutrition, Marasmus and Kwashiorkor due to misguided economic policies, 1972-77

# To make politics work better . . .

- How can we manage the problem of lies and hate speech polluting the well
  - And contributing to death and destruction, as in Digana?
- How can we listen and speak across the bubbles?
- How can we manage manipulations of the political process based on psychographics, bots and viral disinformation?
- Is there hope when the Sinhala language has no word for compromise?
  - Sinhala neologism I propose is මැදුම් සම්මුතිය; Tamil?