The Usage of Social Media during COVID- 19 Lockdown Period of 2020 in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The evolution of media in recent years has changed the audience behavior around the world. After the arrival of digital media, the audience is changing their media habits with convergent media. Social media is the leading medium and specific tool which is used to communicate in the convergent media context. Social media is commonly referred to Web 2.0 internet-based applications that facilitate sharing different information and building relationships with each other in a virtual community. It also plays a dynamic role in transforming people's lifestyles in modern society. After the World Health Organization (WHO) defined the COVID- 19 outbreak as a global pandemic and announced that it will affect every aspect of human life around the globe, many countries around the world took decisions such as imposing curfew, quarantines and closing non-essential stores, schools, universities and factories to control the health pandemic in their countries. As a result of the isolations, individuals are spending more time with social media on their devices to get information and entertain themselves. The people of Sri Lanka also use social media to get updates about the current scenario and control their stress during the lockdown period. This study aimed to determine the usage of social media during the COVID- 19 lockdown period OF 2020 in Sri Lanka. To determine this study Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp and Viber were selected as the most popular social media platforms in Sri Lanka. The study was conducted as a quantitative research approach by using online survey data collection method. Questionnaire tool is used as the quantitative data collection method and data was collected through the online survey of the non-probability convenience sample method. Statistical analytical method is used to analyze the data to determine the usage of social media context in Sri Lankan

society. The research techniques are used to define the research question of "How social media was used in Sri Lanka during the 2020 COVID- 19 lockdown?" Furthermore, findings reflected the characteristic usage of social media in Sri Lankan society during the lockdown period of 2020.

Key words: Social Media, COVID- 19 Pandemic, Lockdown, Sri Lankan society

Introduction

The world has experienced COVID- 19 pandemic with posing serious threat to global public health. It is a global crisis where every one of us is affected and which we have experienced firsthand in our lifetime. The World Health Organization (WHO) defined the COVID- 19 outbreak as the global pandemic that can affect and change every aspect of human life around the globe. During this crisis, lack of awareness, knowledge and preparedness would put people and health care staff at risk. Thus, the public needs access to timely and reliable information about the disease symptoms and its prevention. For this purpose, different communication methods play a major role to fulfill the need for proper information in the worldInformation is gathered mostly through the online technologies and it is used to share information, promote discussion and build relationships. Media convergence concept became the main specific tool to share information in this pandemic situation, because of the lockdown the whole world with isolation.

According to Shereen (2020) COVID- 19 originated from the Hunan seafood market at Wuhan, China, where live bats, snakes, raccoon dogs, wild animals among others were sold in December, 2019. The virus was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020 (WHO, 2020). (One of the ajor aftereffects of this virus is the home isolation which safeguarded people physically as well as psychologically)In this pandemic media convergence hasthe greater advantage of rapid dissemination of communication content in the world.

The convergence dimension of social media is the crucial tool for sharing information and gaining knowledge which people can use to connect with friends, chatting with friends, sharing pictures, videos and photos, playing games. Social media is the critical collection of the web-based systems that allow for mass interaction,

conversation and sharing in the network classification (Murphy, 2013). Furthermore, Savrum & Leon (2015) determine that the social media is the major tool which can be used with the internet and it refers to the electronic network and digital devises.

As an influence of the attractive features of the Face book Sri Lankan online audience has created more changes among the Sri Lankan society. In this critical moment of COVID- 19 pandemic, social media provides a huge connection, which can connect each other world wide Due to lockdown and individual loneliness, there is an increasing usage of social media in the pandemic situation. Therefore social media helps to connect with each other in the cyber society.

In this critical situation, most of Sri Lankans used the social media for different reasons. The most favorable reason is using the social media to destroy the loneliness of people who live in the lockdown areas. Moreover, People use the social media to connect with friends for chatting, sharing pictures, sharing videos, photos and mostly to play games. Not only in Sri Lanka, but the social media influence increased in all around the world. Social media networks help to develop the relationships between friends and relatives in the cyber space. Thus, the social media usage is an important recommendation for isolation at home to help to reduce the psychological impact.

As an influence of the attraction features of the social media, it helped to increase the social media audience in lockdown period in Sri Lanka. With the onset of the COVID- 19 pandemic, social media has rapidly become an important communication tool in Sri Lanka. Increasing usage of social media due to COVID- 19 outbreak period has created a new culture in Sri Lankan society with the influence of the attraction features of the social media content.

The research determined the characteristical usage of social media during the lockdown situation in Sri Lanka. Because social media became an efficient source of information, many individuals connected with the social media due to isolation and suffering from loneliness. Furthermore, social media is recognized as the collection of web base applications which can be used to reduce the psychological impact of the online media users.

Rationale

COVID- 19 disease, firstly reported by officials in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019.Chinese authorities have identified human cases with onset of symptoms in early December 2019. Some of the earliest known cases had a link to a wholesale food market in Wuhan city in China. Many of the initial patients were either stall owners, market employees or regular visitors to this market. All available evidence suggested that the virus has a natural animal origin and is not a manipulated or constructed virus. Scientists proved that it does not support for the laboratory constructed virus. But the cause of the disease was soon confirmed as a novel coronavirus and the infection has since spread to many countries worldwide and has become a pandemic disease. WHO has published information about COVID- 19 and have given different instructions to their users about ways to prevent the spread of the virus, such as keeping a distance between themselves and others, using masks and washing their hands. During this major event, the overall response is usually generated with the health sector. But some of the most relevant characteristics of communication systems also play major role in this pandemic situation in the regional, national, and international levels.

Social media platforms are amongst the most widely used sources of information in the world because of the easy and inexpensive access to the internet and the huge users in these social media platforms. It is the easiest and most effective way to distribute information, during this COVID- 19 lockdown period. Thus overall response usually generates proceeding the communication process in the social media content due to it being the most widely use source of information in the world.

The COVID- 19 pandemic is a recent phenomenon and its studies are still limited. Especially regarding the impact of social media content. Dimaggio (2011) states that the internet changes the society. Furthermore, Bowd (2016) posited that the social media come forward in internet media content with provide more opportunities to share information. Moreover most of researchers define that social media is an online media content which can be activated for a huge online media audience.

In this COVID- 19 pandemic time social media platforms have become an important source for discussing, sharing and getting knowledge. Not only for the sharing information, but also people use the social media to fulfill their essential needs too. According to Kemp (2020) social media tried to lead the people with fulfilling their different needs in lockdown period worldwide. Kent (2020) noted that social media gave everyone the chance to share information with everyone else in this crucial period.

The research determines the usage of social media context during the COVID- 19 outbreak time. It is a contemporary discussion on the usage of social media context during the COVID- 19 situation. Social media gave the chance to share information with everyone. In addition, social media has become an important source for sharing knowledge, experience and act as the entertainment platform during this pandemic situation. Similarly, Dillon (2020) noted that the people spend more time with social media during the COVID- 19 pandemic due to their loneliness.

The COVID- 19 pandemic is defined as the global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge. Stressing every one of the countries it touches; it has the potential to create devastating social, economic and political effects that will leave deep and longstanding scars. People lost their jobs and income, with no way of knowing when normality will return. Hundreds of death can be seen due to the pandemic.

As the result of the COVID- 19, there are curfews, quarantines and similar restrictions (variously described as stay-at-home orders, shelter-in-place orders, in lockdowns) in place in many countries and territories around the world, related to the COVID- 19 pandemic. Sri Lanka also officially announced about the lockdown to the whole country due to the huge spread of COVID- 19 pandemic. Sri Lanka, officially named as the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, is an island country in South Asia, located in the Indian Ocean southwest of the Bay of Bengal and southeast of the Arabian Sea. Sri Lanka has been called "The tear drop of the Indian ocean" because of its shape and location. Thusin this little island in the world, COVID- 19 rapidly spread around the country. Current research has examined the use of the social media context by Sri Lankan online media users at a critical situation.

Methodology

The study was conducted as a quantitative research by using quantitative data collection methods. Questionnaire data collection tool was use as the quantitative survey method. Sample size is 100 of online media users and they were selected as the non-probability convenience method to conduct the online survey to determine the usage of social media during the COVID- 19 period of 2020 in Sri Lanka. To support this study the social media of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp and Viber were selected as the most popular social media platforms in Sri Lanka which were also used as the sample social media platforms of the research.

Statistical analytical methods are used to analyze the data, which is used to determine the effect of social media in Sri Lankan society during the COVID- 19 pandemic situation in 2020. Quantitative data is analyzed by using the EXCEL software. As secondary data, books, articles, and online references are used to determine research findings and were also used to formulate the theoretical and empirical background of this research.

Research findings

With regard to the characteristic usage of the sample, it will define the online user's questionnaire data analysis results of "How to use social media during the COVID- 19 lockdown period of 2020 in Sri Lanka". These research data are presented numerically. It has been analyzed how many of them have participated in the quantity.

Firstly, the result indicates about the background of the online media respondents who were selected as the non-probability convenience sample method.

Table 1: Categorizes participants according to their current engagement

Age Group	Student	Unemployed	Employed
20 and below	6	0	0
21-30	0	12	22
31-40	0	12	38
41-50	0	0	10

Source: Survey data, 2020

The first table above illustrates that participants in this research were segregated based on their current engagement.It is divided into three main parts and this classification is outlined according to the current situation. Also, the classification is based on the age groups allocated according to the research.

Table 2: Categorization of participants according to their education level

Age Group	G.C.E A/L	Under graduate	Graduate	Postgraduate
20 and below	4	0	0	0
21-30	8	12	14	0
31-40	12	6	30	10
41-50	0	0	0	4

Source: Survey data, 2020

The table2 indicates about the characteristic variables of the online survey participants who have joined with the survey which conducted to determine the online media usage in COVID- 19 situation in Sri Lanka. It is classified into four parts of G.C.E A/L, under graduate, graduate and postgraduate. This classification is also categorized by age.

Figure 1: Usage of different devices
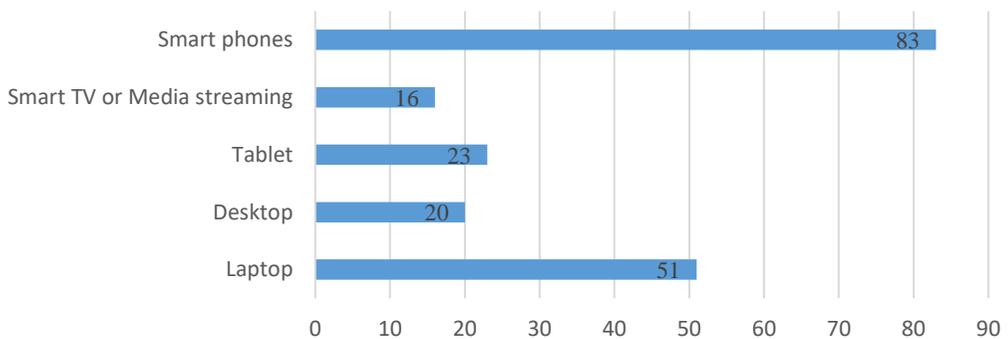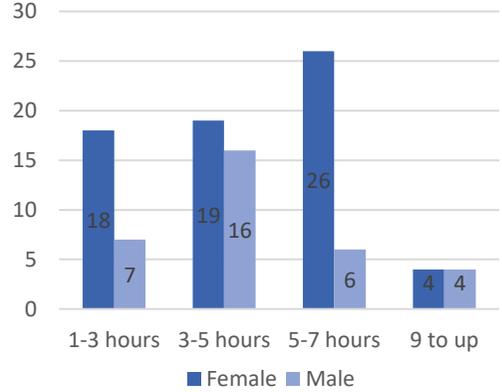

Source: Survey data, 2020

The figure 1 mentions the usage of different devices which is used by the both female and male online respondents. According to the results of figure 1 of the research, most of the online users connect with internet through the smart phones. The results further defines that laptop has also been used by the online media users.

Figure 2: Gender wise social media usage
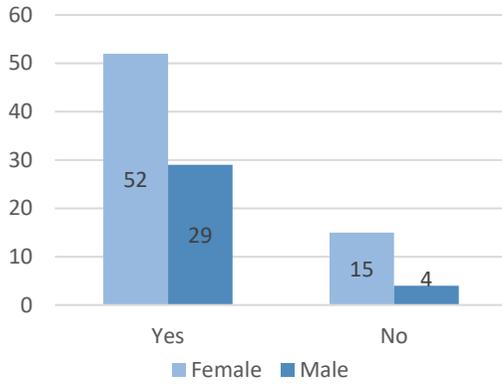
Figure 3: Gender wise social media spending hours

Source: Survey data, 2020

Source: Survey data, 2020

The above figure 2 mentions about the gender wise usage of social media and figure 3 mentions about the gender wise spending hours with the social media. According to No. 2 data analysis figure, social media has been used by both female and male during the COVID-19 lockdown period in 2020. Furthermore, the figure 3 defined the spending time by the different genders. According to this value, female use social media more than male and the female users spend 5-7 hours with social media.

Figure 4: Age wise social media usage
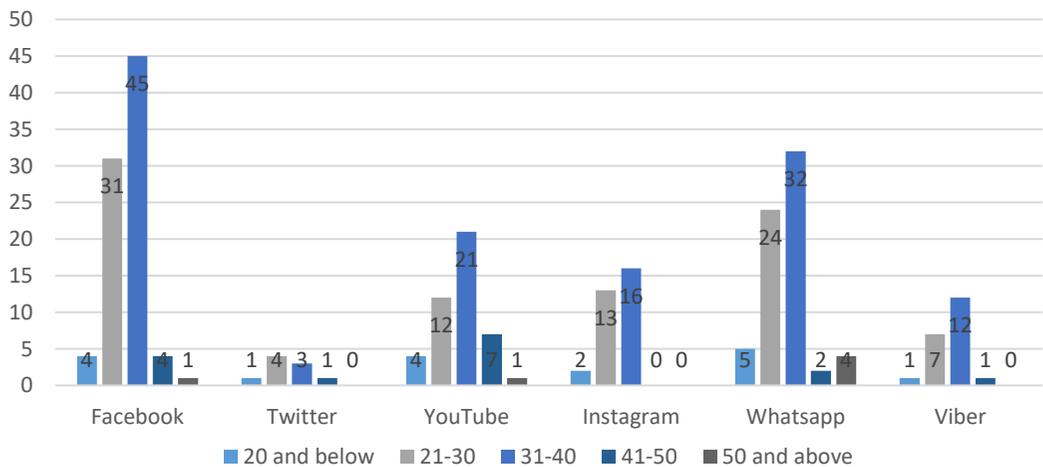
Source: Survey data, 2020

The figure 4 shows the results of age wise usage of social media. Rendering the figure 4, Facebook is the most popular social media platform among these selected social media platforms. And the 31-40 of age group mostly attain with the social media. Moreover, Whatsapp is also increasingly used by the online users during this critical situation.

Figure 5: Mostly used social media activities analysis with age factor
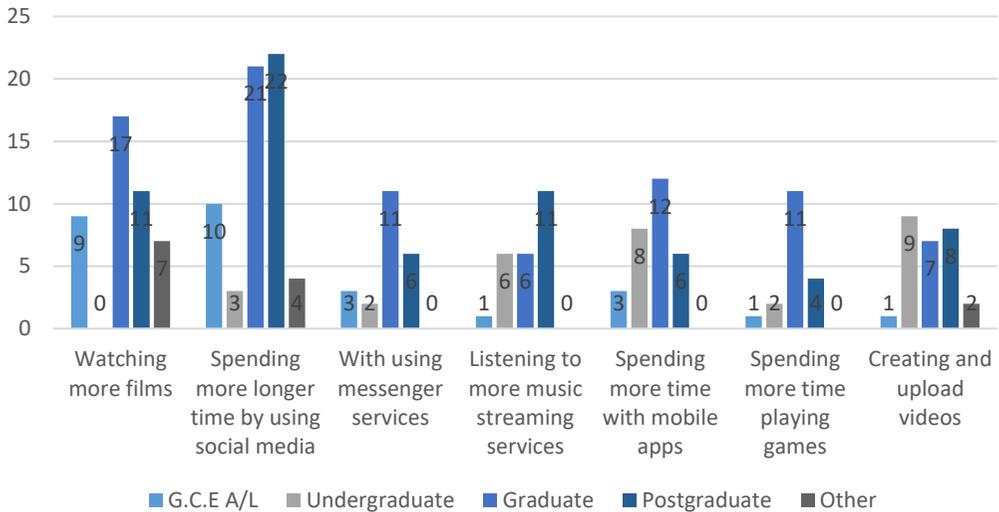
Source: Survey data, 2020

Above data states the mostly used social media activities analysis with regard to the age factor. As the indication of the figure 5, most of graduates and postgraduates have involved with the social media to spend their time during the lockdown period. Also, they have used social media to watch films during this period. In addition, some of social media users use it to spend more time with different mobile applications.

Figure 6: Comparison of the social media usage with participant's current engagement
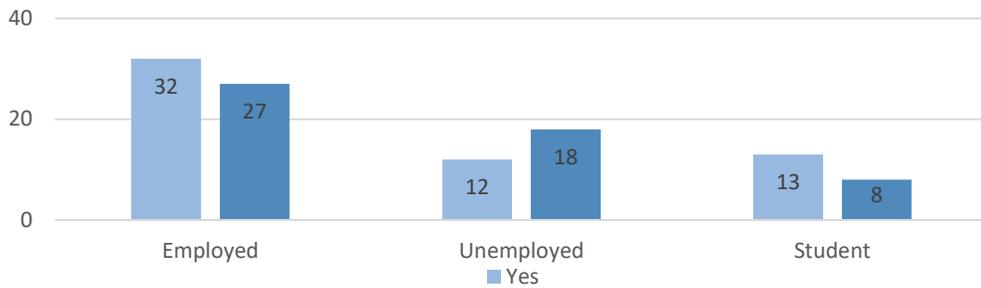
Source: Survey data, 2020

According to the data analysis indicated by figure 6, it shows the comparative results of the social media usage with participant's current engagement. According to its values, all the participants in the survey results revealed that they were more involved with social media, regardless of their status.

Figure 7: Age group factor analysis of attending with social media during the lockdown period.
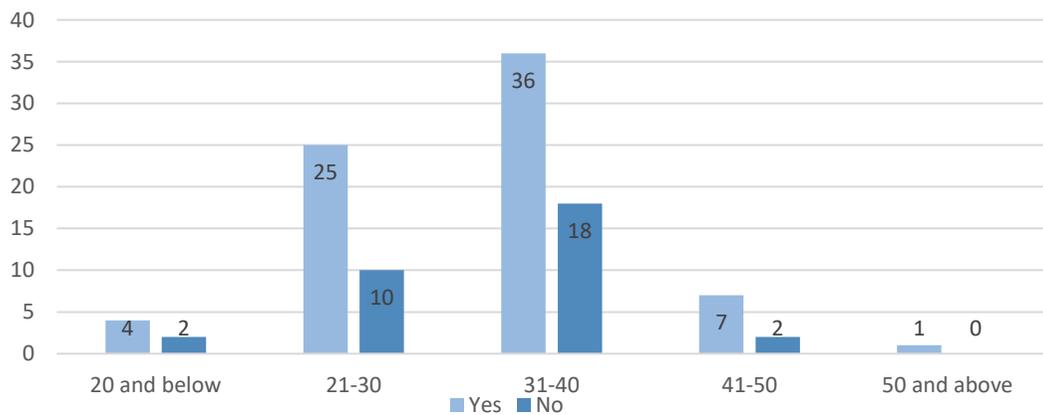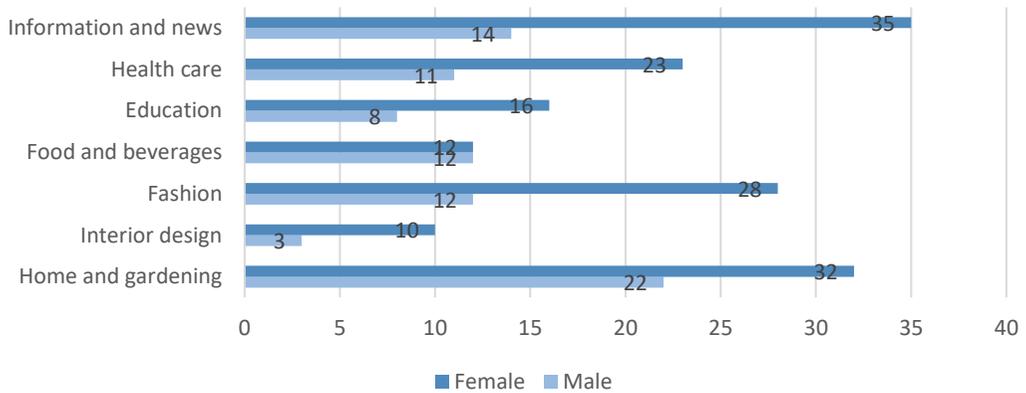

Source: Survey data, 2020

According to the above figure 7 data analysis, it determines which age group is involved with the social media. According to the figure factor, age group of 31 to 40 is involved with social media more than other age groups. Furthermore, age group of 21 to 30 is attended with the social media during the lockdown period in Sri Lanka.

Moreover, 50 and above do not attended with the social media more than other age groups.

Figure 8: search applications analysis with gender factor

Source: Survey data, 2020

According to the figure 7, the most of females areinvolved with the search application in the online media. As the results of this figure, mostly they search information and news. Not only entertainment items, most of the females searched for home and gardening also. Females furthermore searched fashion also from the social media context. Moreover the figure indicates that the males did not involve with the social media more than females during the COVID- 19 lockdown period in Sri Lanka.
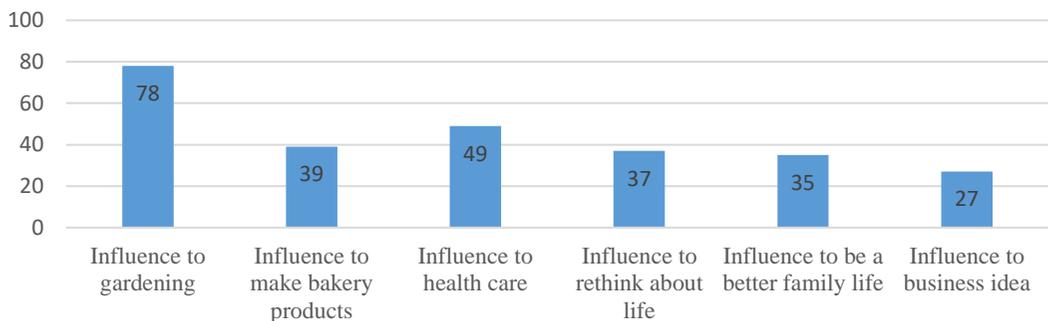
Figure 9: Changing habits during the COVID- 19lockdown period of 2020 in Sri Lanka
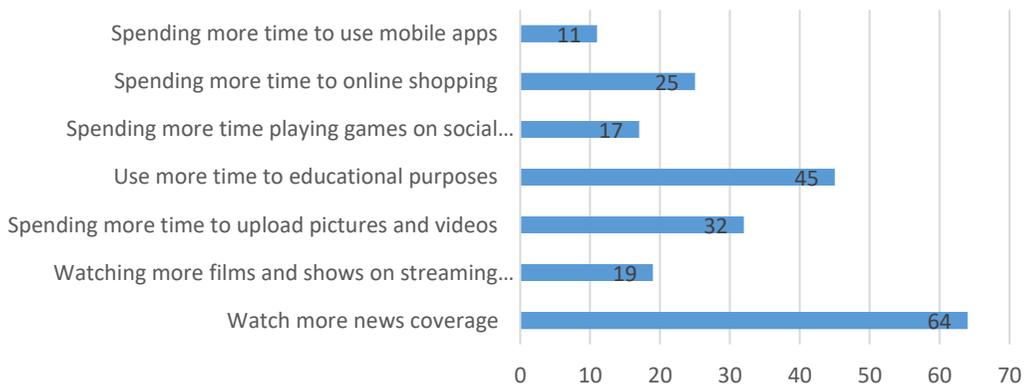
Source: Survey data, 2020

The survey results mentioned about the mostly changing habits during the lockdown period in Sri Lanka. In this period people attained with the news channels to watch more news coverage. Furthermore results indicate that the people engaged with the social media for educational purposes. The other factor of the social media uploads determined by the survey is that, people spent more time to upload pictures and videos.Since because, people have more time to spend without any of work, people share their experience with pictures and videos with their friends and relations. Moreover, people used the social media to online shopping purposes also.

Figure 10: Modified influences in line with social media during the COVID- 19 lockdown period of 2020 in Sri Lanka

Source: Survey data, 2020

The figure 10 indicates the changing habits with the influence of social media during the COVID- 19 lockdown period in 2020. The data determine that most people were influenced by gardening during in this period with the effect of social media. Moreover, they were influenced to the healthcare with the social media during this period. Furthermore people were involved to make homemade bakery products during this period with the influence of the social media.

Further, the research data evidenced that most number of people use smart phones to connect with the internet during the COVID- 19 lockdown situation in 2020. Women between the ages of 31-40 are increasingly hanging out with social media to meet their various needs during the epidemic as well as to alleviate their anxiety. Facebook drives as the most popular social media application and people believe it provides variety of information than the other social media means. Among the users, online

users are mostly attached to social media to gain entertainment items and be updated with latest information about the situation. Most of online users attain with the new social media groups during the COVID- 19lockdown period than before..

Conclusions of the research

As the conclusion of the research it defines that the new crowd has gathered towards the social media during the COVID- 19 lockdown period of 2020 in Sri Lanka. They mostly use the social media to share their important things with their relations and the friends. Mostly, the Sri Lankans use the social media platforms of Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube to share their information. Furthermore, social media has pros and cons which can help during the pandemic to share new important information, diagnostic, treatment and make strong relationships between friends and relatives.It has kept people somewhat isolated.

New findings from this study show that Sri Lankans are increasingly using their mobile phones to use social media.It has also been found that females are more likely to interact with social media than males and are tempted to devote 5 to 7 hours a day to their daily routine. The data also found that the age group of 31-40 years was the most used on social media, with Facebook and WhatsApp being the most used social media. Considering the data, it was revealed that Sri Lankan social media users are using social media for no particular reason. Data shows that people who are employed in particular use social media more to inquire about information and news. Accordingly, it can be pointed out that it is a new trend to seek information through social media during this period.

There is an immense contribution of social media to Sri Lankans for continuing their normal life in the COVID- 19 lockdown epidemic situation in 2020. Increasingly people were attached with the social media during this period and they depend on the influential impact received from social media. Most people have adjusted their daily routine in accordance with social media. For instance, one good move of what they learn from social media would be home gardening. Thus the research conclusion determines that a huge impact has occurred in Sri Lankan society during the COVID- 19 lockdown pandemic in 2020.Accordingly, this research confirms that there is a tendency of Sri Lankan people towards social media in COVID- 19 lockdown period.

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