Informative role of Mass Media during Covid-19 period: A study from Northern Province at Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Presently COVID-19 affects the world people's lifestyle and health. Most of the people are isolated from their family, friends and relatives. And they follow social distance procedure to protect themselves from the diseases. Due to the pandemic entire world move from in person conversation to web-based communication. So, during this period media spread more information regarding COVID-19 issues. Ultimate purpose of this study is to identify the informative role of media during this pandemic period. Data was collected through the questionnaire and quantitative study conducted to finalize the variables. Descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) used to found solution for the research question and finally we found how people believe and react to media information and according to the finding of the research conclusion and recommendations.

Key words: Media, COVID-19, Information, Northern Province

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 epidemic was created massive effect to entire world such as increased deaths, worldwide stock exchange has fallen down, and many sports events have been cancelled and increase the goods shortage in the marketplace. Finally, it changed the behavior of the society and people in a different pattern (Lamb 2020). Media are playing major role to disseminate the COVID-19 related information to public. Meanwhile presently user generated contents are growing up in media like Television, Radio, Newspaper and social media (Valero 2020). And all firms are come out from corporate web site to media's networking site to interact with the people and shift the people into their corporate page (Chan 2019). In these time Media play their social responsibility role effectively to share updated information to public because information regarding the pandemic is an important element to reduce people's unnecessary thoughts (Pris 2020). Furthermore, media proving necessary information in an understandable, clear and quick manner to the public.

Now media are providing sufficient information to people regarding this disease which are very clear, understandable and time to time updated by the people or users. But even though some kinds of the information are spread by the people to confuse or convert the people mindset. Because media allow

all people to share their opinion freely especially social networking site (Lie 2019). Especially during this period social networking site helped to people to connect with their family, friends and loved ones. Now social media helped to know the situation about COVID-19 around the world. But before believing in social media information, we should ensure that information is came from trusted source otherwise it will create panic among people (Chan 2019).

In Sri Lanka all people are affected by this epidemic because it crated many challenges to entire people. Especially Northern Province after thirty years of civil war, people have started their works and business from beginning. But unfortunately, due to this COVID-19 now they have a panic regarding their livelihood. Normally these people depend on agricultural activities. But now diversified information spreading by the Medias regarding lockdown & curfew, social distancing, virus spreading speed, death of the people and wrong treatments for COVID-19. Due to these reasons, they got fear regarding the virus and they are not ready to involve agricultural activities because of the price instability and cost of production is higher than the sales revenue of their products.

Furthermore, media provide vast amount of updated information via various channels from various places to the public. But only some of them came from trusted sources with confirmation or evidence. Most of the information published in other sources without any confirmation. These situations raised confusion and panic among people. In Northern Province many people are under rural area. They do not have the complete knowledge to critically evaluate those media information. Once information is spread through media then people instantly accept that information without any elucidations even if that information is fake one. So finally, media play a major role in their lifestyle especially in these days. So this study aims to identify the informative role of social media during COVID-19 epidemic period.

Research Question

What is the role of mass media during COVID-19 Pandemic period?

LITERATURE REVIEW

COVID-19 and media

Media gives different platform to people according to their information seeking behavior (Geo 2018). It allows users to create and share their ideas and opinions with others. Based on advanced latest technology media offer many opportunities to its users. Media are contributing to government, business and consumers during this crisis period to disseminate their information with others. And

especially in social media, presently people are sharing meaningful and misinformation regarding COVID-19 (Cole 2020). Misinformation is the wrong information it would be misguide the people (Stabl 2020). So people are getting struggle to found the fact from fiction (Cole 2020). Media provide the information with clear transparence and accuracy manner to people by authorized sources (Chen 2018). Presently government, health workers, public communities and individual people moved to social media to get updated and sufficient information regarding the virus. However they are facing some kinds of problems by various and conflicting information found online (Huang 2020).

Informative role of Media during COVID-19 period

The independent contribution of media had provided major contribution during that harder period (Nalaka 2020). In Sri Lanka this virus induced to postpone the parliament election. Furthermore, the ministry of health epidemiology unit is publishing the timely and updated information via trusted media to entire public in Tamil, Sinhala and English language. Meanwhile lots of official information are come from authorized Government departments (Nalaka 2020). During this pandemic time all media group extremely give their admirable support to deliver accurate and reliable information regarding the dieses to people. And they collectively performed during that crisis period (Thanuja 2020). Many people and authorized media channels share meaning full and factual information about pandemic via their sources such as newspaper, Television, Radio and their Social media page. Expert and professional people also participated forums and share information with others (Glencorse 2020). Even though according to the UNESCO report, 112 billion social media are containing 64 languages, and which are related with COVID-19 epidemic. Meanwhile out of those posts 40% of the posts came from unauthorized or unreliable source. So, 1/3 of social media users are seeking misleading or wrong information regarding the virus (Khail 2020). This fake information is quickly spread fear among people (Davies 2020). Unfortunately, 1/3 of the people agree that social media have exaggerated the COVID-19 pandemic among people. (Oxford University 2020). Misinformation is created fear among people by encouraging them to follow wrong advice panic and unsuitable treatments to that COVID-19 (CBC 2020). People share their opinion freely without any confirmation (Johns Hopkins 2020).

Current Situation of Sri Lanka

During this crisis period, Sri Lanka has changed their functions and operation through digitalization. And media platform give the enabler to entire for their awareness. Furthermore current problem may potential create E-Commerce platform to entire country especially via social media (Kithmina 2020). Srilankan government is taking necessary action against people those who spread wrong information via media especially these days (Vimukthi 2020). This pandemic makes Sri Lankans people more on

media to connect with other people and they collect too much information to protect themselves (Ellepola 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the study is to identify the major Informative role of media during COVID-19 pandemic. Especially this study attends capture perception of the for that purpose, Northern Province of Sri Lanka was selected as a sample. This study conducted quantitative method of approach and survey method used for collecting data. By use of stratified sampling method 250 people are randomly selected for this study. Questionnaire was used to collect primary data from the respondent. This sample size contains 50 people from each 5 district. And to rate the respondent answers multi – item five –point liker scale was used by the researcher. It mentions strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1). The study was used frequency tables to analyze data at the descriptive level of analysis, while exploratory factor analysis was to found the informative role of social media during COVID-19 period. Data analysis was done through the instrumentality of the SPSS software 20.0.

ANALYSIS

Reliability and validity

Validity:

Validity used to ensure the accuracy of measures. If the research contain high validity it indicates output or result that correspond to real properties, characteristics and variation in the physical or social world. To identify the validity of the instrument we used KMO measurements because it explains sampling adequacy and appropriateness of data for the analysis. According to the Kaizer 1974 he explained that, the value of KMO is more than 0.90 then, it is superior for the research. So, present study contains 0.964 values which leads to the good for the work. And at the same time, the below table shows the value of Chi – Square, 13185.872 ($P=0.000<0.05$). It indicates that, data is more appropriate for the analysis in the present study. And there is perfect association with itself and no association with other variable.

KMO and Bartlett's Test for Validity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.964
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	13185.872
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

Reliability Statistics

Reliability explains the consistency of measures and cronbach's alpha is used to confirm the consistency of the variables. Based on the Nounally statements (1978), he suggested the value of cronbach alpha should be more than 0.50, therefore, in this study, all main factors are having cronbach's alpha value more than 0.7 which also a good sign for the study.

Reliability Statistics table

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
Extended Awareness	0.861	6
Reluctance had created	0.875	3
Confident level Induced	0.784	3
Exaggeration of information	0.730	3
Diversified information	0.817	3
Fear had generated	0.791	2

Descriptive Statistics

Item	No	%
Gender		
Male	85	34
Female	165	66
Educational Qualifications		
Ordinary Level	26	10.4
Advanced Level	46	18.4
Diploma level	25	10
Undergraduates	52	20.8
Graduates	101	40.4

Monthly income		
Below 25000	106	42.4
25000-50000	94	37.6
50000-75000	31	12.4
Above 75000	19	7.6
Types of media usage		
Television	68	27.2
Radio	14	5.6
News paper	7	2.8
Social media	161	64.4
Media usage times		
1 Time	31	12.4
5 Times	68	27.2
10 Times	19	7.6
Unlimited	132	52.8

Descriptive statistics is the characteristics of the population or phenomenon. That is being studied and meanwhile descriptive study focus on describing the nature of the demographical segment. According to the current research 250 questionnaires are issued among Northern Province, out of them 66 percentage female (66%) respondent and 34 percentage male respondents. And when we compare the educational qualifications of the respondents graduates are contributed more than others. Moreover majority of the people's income levels are below 25000 (42.4 %). at the same time large amount of people are using social medias to gather information about COVID-19 pandemic issue (64.4%) and those people using such social media in a unlimited manner.

Exploratory factor analysis

Rotated Component Matrix

	Component					
	Extended Awareness	**Reluctance had created**	**Confident level Induced**	**Exaggeration of information**	**Diversified information**	**Fear had generated**
Item 3	.832					
Item 4	.785					
Item 1	.758					

Item 2	.752					
Item 15	.717					
Item 6	.593					
Item 13		.835				
Item 12		.824				
Item 11		.773				
Item 20			.821			
Item 18			.768			
Item 19			.712			
Item 5				.812		
Item 7				.796		
Item 8				.616		
Item 16					.808	
Item 14					.588	
Item 17					.545	
Item 10						.778
Item 9						.736

Component Score Coefficient Matrix

	Component					
	Extended Awareness	**Reluctance had created**	**Confident level Induced**	**Exaggeration of information**	**Diversified information**	**Fear had generated**
Item 3	.233					
Item 4	.229					
Item 1	.240					
Item 2	.234					
Item 15	.184					
Item 6	.140					
Item 13		.406				
Item 12		.401				
Item 11		.359				
Item 20			.483			

Item 18			.381			
Item 19			.356			
Item 5				.468		
Item 7				.436		
Item 8				.296		
Item 16					.475	
Item 14					.317	
Item 17					.256	
Item 10						.507
Item 9						.491

Ranking of Factors

F.No	**Factors**	**Coefficient**	**Rotated Component**	**C*r**	**Ranking factors**	**Rank**
1	**Extended Awareness**	.240	.832	0.199680	**0.199680**	**6**
2	**Reluctance had created**	.406	.835	0.339010	**0.339010**	**5**
3	**Confident level Induced**	.483	.821	0.396543	**0.396543**	**1**
4	**Exaggeration of information**	.468	.812	0.380016	**0.380016**	**4**
5	**Diversified information**	.475	.808	0.383800	**0.383800**	**3**
6	**Fear had generated**	.507	.778		**0.394446**	**2**

				0.394446		

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) uses to identify the factors under specific circumstances. This study conducted EFA, to explore the media's role during COVID-19 period. So research had developed a survey to reach the objective. Through the EFA all survey items were classified into six factors such as Extended Awareness, Reluctance had created, Confident level Induced, Exaggeration of information, Diversified information and Fear had generated. All factors ranked according to their higher value.

According to ranking of factor analysis, Factor 3 indicates Confident level Induced which is the first rank. Because, in factor 3, Confident level Induced implies highest values of individual score and factor score compare with other factors.

According to ranking of factor analysis, Factor 6 indicates Fear had generated which is the second rank. Because this factor contains second highest value.

According to ranking of factor analysis, Factor 5 indicates Diversified information which is the third rank. Because this factor has higher value than other three factors.

According to ranking of factor analysis, Factor 4 indicates Exaggeration of information which is the 4^{th} rank. Because, these factors contain little higher value than other two factors.

According to ranking of factor analysis, Factor 2 indicates Reluctance had created which is the 4th rank. Because, it has second lowest value than other four variables.

According to ranking of factor analysis, Factor 1 indicates Extended Awareness which is the sixth rank. Because this factor contains lowest value from factor ranking table.

DISSSCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The world faced many struggles and challenges due to COVID-19 virus since 2019. Its effect gradually spread across the world. All countries have been taking necessary action to prevent from such virus. Meanwhile every country's media provide major role to convey the information to people. Social distancing also led to enhance media's role. Because during this epidemic period government of the country took many actions such as curfew and social distance. In Sri Lanka, television, radio, newspapers and social media are providing updated information to the general public. But even though people got confusion about this virus because they don't face such virus in past. So, they believed information which is gathered from media. And they also depend on media's information. The study found major informative role of media during the COVID=19 period, and this issue

induced confident level of people because media had provided timely information in an updated manner.

Normally such information is received from health professionals, consultancies, friends and experts, since such information often first-hand. But sometimes media is disseminating inappropriate information and overestimate the importance of the news (Bass 2020). Due to this inappropriate information many people got fear about COVID-19.Media spread huge amount of diversified information, therefore it leads to Reluctance.

According to the findings of the study during this COVID-19 crisis period, Northern Province people were used social media as an information gathering tool and such media had induced their confident level against COVID-19. Meantime due to some unauthorized information people also got fear about the disease. Current study had provided support to people to understand the actual contribution of the media during this pandemic. This study has some limitation such as only Northern Province is selected as a sample. In future, others can do this research in other Sri Lankan provinces. Current study collect questionnaires through emails, in future it will be better to collect data directly than email process.

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