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**“ITUKAMA,” the “Hero” and the Nation: A specific textual analysis of a commercial and its contribution to Sri Lankan society amid Covid-19****S.V.W. Udugahapattuwa**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** This study focuses on the Itukama commercial launched by the Itukama project under the Presidential Secretariat. The commercial was a campaign to raise funds for the Itukama COVID-19 Healthcare and Social Security Fund. The campaign was considered a success. The commercial appealed to a sense of duty and responsibility in the Nation's people by carefully narrating the building of a new hero of sorts, placing them side by side with existing heroes. The study aims to analyse the commercial elements of the campaign in order to identify the process of the creation of the/a hero(s), the necessity therein at the time, how it aided in the national agenda, and the choices of inclusion and exclusion by virtue of the use of theories of nation-building.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study uses the methodology of textual analysis thereby providing a close reading of the commercial and the campaign in relation to the said theories.

**Findings:** Through the analysis, it was made evident that while the commercial and the campaign that followed crafted a new definition for the concept of 'hero' and located it within the context of the 'nation' it was lacking in inclusivity.

**Originality:** Analysis of a COVID-19 commercial (campaign) in the Sri Lankan context is the pioneering study in Sri Lanka.

**Implications:** Language use in commercials and the concept of 'hero' and 'nation' provide a lesson for the relevant corporates.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Hero, Nation, Representation, Sri Lankan Commercials, Visualisation

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## INTRODUCTION

“I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and emigres and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also, the gathering of people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statutes, immigration status - the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh man” (Bhabha, 1994: 139)

Sri Lanka has seen her fair share of scattering, scattering of the people, and the gathering of the people all in her name, in the name of the 'Nation'. The global pandemic tightening its hold on Sri Lanka can be considered one of the most recent events that caused a scattering and a gathering of sorts. At the time of writing this paper, the country is battling a second wave of COVID-19, with lockdowns being imposed in different parts of the country. While full recovery may be in the distant future, the country and its people are constantly attempting to make sense of the global chaos that has unfolded. The World Bank Report: Sri Lanka Development update 2021, the Economic and Poverty Impact of COVID-19 highlights that Sri Lanka's growth rate declined by 3.6%, and the recovery forecast in terms of growth for Sri Lanka is up to 3.4% in 2021 (World Bank, 2021). The report states that this recovery is possible with the 'opening of the country until May 2021. Thus, the importance of a commercial campaign comes into play with the Itukama commercial taking the forefront, which will be analysed and discussed as follows.

Advertising is a powerful tool. In “How advertising has become an agent of social change” (2015), Charly Jaffe highlights that the average American is exposed to over 500 television commercials a day (Jaffe, 2015). However, with the advent of the internet, television is no longer the 'only' means of exposure to commercials. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat – essentially all of 'Social Media' provide a platform for commercials. The We Are Social 2019 digital statistics of the country ranks YouTube in second place among the most popular searches in Sri Lanka and draws an over 6 million audience on Facebook (We Are Social, 2019: 23-28).

Thus, it is evident that the reach of commercials through television and the internet has proliferated over time. Thereby, during moments of chaos, such platforms are available to audiences with a more extensive reach for messages to be 'directed'. It has become a popular trend among marketers to 'make commercials' to indicate a/the brands' commitment to society. A survey conducted by The Nielsen Company (US) in 2015 highlights that 62% of the global respondents adhere to the trust factor defining a brand to determine the product they would purchase. Other statistics in the

report indicate that close to 50% of the respondents would prefer to buy products from brands committed to social values (The Nielsen Company, 2015).

Steve Olenski in *The Promises And Pitfalls Of Socially Conscious Marketing* (2018) highlights that the purchasing power has now shifted to Millennials and the group demands socially responsible business:

A full 91% of millennials would change their purchasing decision to support a brand they saw as supporting a cause, according to a 2015 Cone Communications study. They are shown to be a group that's not only very active on social media but proactive in engaging with and promoting brands they find associated with causes they care about (Olenski, 2018).

In recent years, Sri Lanka has seen an increase in such marketing trends, with a cause being promoted through advertisements. Logic dictates that this is a 'win-win' situation for both society and the brand. However, marketers, as necessary by their profession, must be profit-oriented in their strategies.

The Itukama commercial was identified as a viable commercial for the purpose of this study, which is essentially to analyse the manner in which it contributes to the discourse of the 'Nation' via the creation of a new set/body of heroes. The commercial has been chosen mainly in its attempt to generate a feeling of duty and responsibility in terms of the viewer in the context of COVID-19.

This research aims to investigate,

1. How a Sri Lankan commercial crafts the concept of the 'hero' for the Sri Lankan masses.
2. The choices that have been made in the representation, evolution, and tropes that imply the concept of a/the hero with an investigation as to whether the construction of the hero assists in contributing to the agenda of the Nation in a specific Sri Lankan context of COVID-19.
3. An assumption-based analysis of choices made in terms of inclusion(s) and exclusion(s) in the specific commercial and campaign therein with a further analysis of their contribution to the discourse of building the concept of the 'nation' in order to evoke a sense of duty and responsibility towards the Nation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Itukama commercial**

The Itukama commercial first premiered in May 2020 as a promotional campaign for the Itukama project launched as a fund-raising initiative for the COVID-19 Healthcare and Social Security Fund. It was a project launched to support and strengthen activities aimed at mitigating the spread of COVID-19 while supporting the community and providing for social needs arising from the pandemic (Itukama, 2020).

With the project's initiation, a Facebook page was formed in April 2020 with the slogan: #LivesFirst: Exhibiting the approach taken by the government to battle the pandemic. The Itukama website (Itukama ඉටුකම සෙය්කදම - ඉටුකරමු අපේ යුතුකම) which is available in all three languages (Sinhala, Tamil, and English) highlights that the Nation embraced the stance of prioritizing life as opposed to the economy and therefore therein it is the duty; the "itukama", of the people to abide by the guidelines, to in turn, protect themselves for the 'heroes' who are battling the pandemic for and on behalf of the Nation, essentially suggesting that this then will be how the people of the Nation fulfill their duty for the Nation.

The campaign was driven with carefully crafted linguistic slogans, of which the following stand out: "මුලින්ම අපේ ජීවිත ගත හිතපු රට වෙනුවෙන් අපේ යුතුකම" which roughly translates to "firstly, let us do our part for the Nation that places our lives above all else" and "වගකීමෙන් එහාට ගෙස් අපි වෙනුවෙන් යුතුකම් ඉටුකළ ඔවුන් වෙනුවෙන්, දැන් ඉටුකරමු අපේ යුතුකම! ආයුධ උපකරණයකට මුහුණ දීමට තරම් ජීවිතයක් ඉටුකරමු" (Itukama ඉටුකම සෙය්කදම) in which, the slogans were published and circulated in all three languages.

Several posts were launched before the premiering of the commercial on social media, showcasing the 'heroes' of the pandemic battling it for the benefit of society and donations made for those who struggle. These could be considered 'teasers' prior to the premiering of the actual commercial per se. The concept of the 'hero' that emanated therein was an extension to the traditional definition of a hero, thus highlighting the fact that, how language is used is as equally important as the process of visualization in a commercial therein; in the promulgation of a precisely nuanced ideology – in this case, the hero.

While the primary focus is mainly on the Itukama commercial, to further explore the stance of 'hero' depicted, an overview depiction of the video campaigns released after the main commercial as 'short episode clips' that continued to be aired until around October 2020 too must be referred to. These campaigns featured slogans such as "Meeteren Jeevithe" and "Wagakiyamu."

The principal commercial begins with a young boy trying to put on what can be inferred as his father's Army boots. He nearly trips over and is caught before the fall by his grandmother while they both watch television. The screen of the television displays Army personnel working together with other officials to battle the pandemic. The scene then shifts to an infant waving goodbye to a mother who is a nurse. The child bursts into tears, appealing to the mother to remain with the family and therein has to be consoled by his father. Following this scene, a woman clad in a shalwar-kameez (a possible stereotypical visual representation of those who identify as part of the country's Tamil and/or Muslim community) packs several lunch packets into a bag. At the same time, her son, sits on the table crafting face masks out of single-rule paper and rubber bands. He drops one into the bag; the bag is then hung on the handle

of the door to be picked up by someone wearing a khaki shirt, off-screen, who the child attempts to go to and greet, but is not allowed to by the mother (a visual representation of the Police or PHI). The next scene showcases a little girl playing with her mother. A man clutching a stethoscope and wearing a mask attempting to say goodbye or simply see his daughter before going to the hospital or returning to the hospital. The little child tries to run to him, but the mother stops her. She settles to worship her father from afar, and her father sends her his blessings from afar by extending his hand towards her. The mother looks at him with a sense of sadness but with courage as she hugs her child. The commercial closes with the message of 'performing' one's duty to the Nation by mentioning how to donate to the fund ('Itukama', the fund-raising initiative for the COVID-19 Healthcare and Social Security Fund, 2020: 00:00-01:28).

Thus, the video 'rebrands' the concept of a traditional 'hero.' While there is a feat being achieved, the nature of the feat has differed from the Aristotelean. While a host of actors perform the visualization of action, its significance lies in the vocalization (voice and song) and the Sinhala and Tamil lyrics of the musical vocalization that is played as an undertone (in the background) of the visual scene(s) highlighting the sacrifice(s) made by the 'heroes' of this pandemic for the safety of society.

With its launch, the musical vocalization was at times made a caller tune for local mobile phone calls, leading to a drive-in concert organized by popular Sri Lankan musical artists to raise funds for the project. It was deemed a remarkable success. The project has raised Rs. 1,827,314,924.00 as at 16.06.2021 (Itukama, 2020).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Several studies concerning Sri Lankan commercials have been conducted in the recent past that have conducted a content analysis of the effect of commercials on their viewers. Dissanayaka and Niroshani, in their research *A Study of Sri Lankan Television Commercials as a Factor of Shaping Consumer Mentality* (2020), use several theories: Marxism, Psychological, Sociological and Multimodal techniques to analyse the effects of five television commercials. The study confirms the hypothesis that commercials affect the orientation of the consumers' mindset. However, the study does not look at the concept of the 'nation' crafted by commercials to encourage the viewers to endorse a/the nationalistic values presented. Udovita conducted a similar study while Mujahid in *Factors Determining Celebrity Endorsement and Impact on Brand Loyalty: A Sri Lanka Based Study* (2018) on Cosmetic Advertising highlights the effect created by choice of celebrity for the promotion of the brand. Hewapathirana and Batuwangala (2018) in *Oriental Cultural Values Depicted in Advertising, with Special Reference to the Sri Lankan Context* (2018), discusses the post-three-decade war context in relation to advertising with the effect of the use of oriental cultural values on the audience. While the present study concerns a similar area of research, the methodology is not quantitative, and thus the analysis remains purely textual.

With limited literature in relation to the notion of hero, Nation, and commercial advertisement, this mini-study attempts at analysing a single commercial in relation to its textual representation with further identification of the use of the strategies used in the larger agenda of the construction of a hero to further the notion of the Nation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study qualitatively and textually analyses the *Itukama* commercial, which was part of the *Itukama* Project launched by the Presidential Secretariat. Lakehouse Digital handled its circulation on YouTube. The commercial is analysed as the text for this study, analysing the use of the concepts of the creation of a/the hero and how this hero contributes to the national agenda of invoking a sense of duty and responsibility. The study also looks at exclusions and the choice of symbol usage and tropes used to communicate the critical message commercially.

Thereby the study is essentially a close reading of the textual aspect of the commercial. As the study bases its text on recent events, there is a dearth of written literature on the topic.

Thus, the principal commercial will be the focus of the study; previous posts and video episodes published after the premiering of the commercial will also be briefly referred to as they are part of the more extensive *Itukama* Project campaign.

The study, while commenting on the choices of the decisions made in the commercials, does not attempt to identify the effect of the commercials on the audience quantitatively. The study primarily acts as a discussion and entry point for a quantitative study in the future. This study aims to analyse the construction of the conception of the Nation and how it, in turn, evokes a sense of duty in the audience in terms of advertising campaigns. The choice of the text being a commercial was determined by the number of views which is at the time of writing this stands at 130,441 (Lake House Digital, 2020) on YouTube (not simply as a commercial but as a video). It does not take into account the views and outreach on other social media platforms.

## **ANALYSIS**

The creative craftsmanship of the commercial within the socio-political context in which it was staged possessed the ability to create an arousing of patriotic emotions among the viewers. The initial stimulations of the commercial make the viewer feel empathy and warmth. Most importantly, it creates an impetus within the audience to donate, which is evidently the aim of the commercial.

In the analysis of this commercial, it is essential to identify the context. The commercial attempts to foster a feeling of duty towards the Nation and thereby encourage the viewer to donate. Before the premiering of this advertisement, there was social media activity where memes creatively depicted the Triforces, the health

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care sector staff, and the essential service sector workforce as modern heroes of our time and social context, braving the risk of COVID-19 to serve the Nation and its people. While tracing the origins of such a social media phenomena is complex, it is now a concept that is part of the Sri Lankan social media context lives. The Facebook page (7) *Itukama ඉටුකම සෙය්කදායම | Facebook* created in April 2020 include a host of visualizations of patriotism, of which the following are a few:



Figure 1: “Thama daruwan muhuna nodakina, ratema daruwange sith sanasana, owun thamai dunne ape jeewitha walata mul thana”

The text in the picture translates to Not seeing the faces of their children, yet consoling all the children of the Nation, they are the ones who put our lives first (සෙය්කදායම, *Itukama ඉටුකම*, 2020).



Figure 2: “Kapaweema newei meka kekkuma, Nathnam rate hama jeewithekatama deida multhana”

Figure two is a representation of the health care workers and their sacrifice. The text in the picture could be translated to “This is not just a commitment for them, it is an ache they feel for the Nation, if not would they put all lives of the Nation first”? (செய்கடமை, Itukama ஓபுகை, 2020).

The above figure reflects the range of 'heroes' that have become part of the task force of ensuring the safety of society. The text in the picture roughly translates to: “Though they differ in appearance and uniform, they are all warriors in this battle” (செய்கடமை, Itukama ஓபுகை, 2020).



**Figure 3: "Penumen, Nila adumen wenas wunata, me satanee hamoma wiruwan"**

Each visual entails a different message. It is a message that indicates the service of these 'warriors' or 'heroes' while inferring that we as people of the Nation should do our part, for their sacrifice to mean something.

It is pertinent to identify Nation as a summation at this juncture. In *Nation and state in Nation-Building as a Necessary Effort in Fragile States* (2016) René Grotenhuis highlights that the concept of the Nation is stubborn, often evading definitions (Grotenhuis, 2016: 26). Grotenhuis further refers to *Origins of nations: contested beginnings, contested futures* by Jennifer Jackson-Preece (2010) to explain the manner in which the concept of the Nation is 'perceived':

[...] Nation is a construct, built and altered by people to define the identity of a political community in ever-changing circumstances. This construct is a mixture of old and new, of traditional elements and new inventions necessary to build a contextual story of 'we.' The constructivist approach is well aware of the historical components of national identity and the importance of historical and legendary myths and heroes serving as a foundation for that

identity, without taking these historical ingredients as the fixed and decisive elements of nationhood. (Grotenhuis, 2016:26).

The constructivist approach to the Nation thus permits it to evolve from the inclusion of the previous tradition of heroes to those that are deemed imminent and indispensable to a cause in relation to a specific social context. It does not thus take away from the established 'historical ingredients' but rather adds on to it, expands it, manipulates its malleability, and creates a new discourse, as evident in this commercial. No more is a hero, the only one with super-human qualities and appearance, but rather one who performs one's role amidst crisis, as the commercial highlights.

Thus the traditional, colloquial concept/idea of a/the hero as it is, is ruptured by this representation of a new image of the hero that is validated and promulgated via the commercial, attempting further, to evoke a sense of duty that will encourage the viewer to contribute to a cause. The showcasing of the sacrifices made by these heroes is a persuasion of sorts to validate, identify and therein contribute.

Thus, it is imperative that the concept of the hero as a metaphor in the construct of the Nation is analysed. While the concept of 'heroes' has and still continues to be defined, this study analyses the text and 'hero' drawing from the definitions in narration. Fallaw and Brunk in *Heroes & Hero Cults in Latin America* (2006) define the concept of a hero as:

[...] a hero is a person to whom remarkable courage, talent, and other noble, even godlike traits are attributed by members of a community and who thus acquires a lasting place of importance in that community's culture (Fallaw and Brunk, 2006).

This take on the hero is further expanded in the Introductory chapter, where Fallaw and Brunk highlight that the purpose of creating such heroes is to serve as a 'cultural glue' where the concept of a 'hero' becomes necessary in uniting scattered communities. With Sri Lanka being a multi-ethnic and a multi-cultural one, "it becomes necessary for such communities to unite, producing a hero creates a united relatability" (Fallaw and Brunk, 3, 2006) – aspects effectively captured by the creative force behind the commercial with the aim of nation-building.

As opposed to a scattered group of people, a united group of people is more advantageous to the Nation, specifically for those authoritative figures of the Nation. Thus, the employment of such a uniting 'hero/ heroic' figure to extend a sense of control is evident though subtly projected by virtue of creativity.

[...] political leaders often invoke heroes to bolster their legitimacy through association with admired predecessors or in the hope of making citizens more virtuous and productive by giving them models of behaviour to follow (Fallaw and Brunk, 3, 2006).

The heroes chosen would often be virtuous, models whom the Nation's people could follow, as is evident in the commercial creatively incorporating the context of time.

Upon textual analysis, it is evident that the Itukama commercial creates an atmosphere it wants the Nation to receive in many ways. The project's campaign of the Facebook posts as mentioned introduces this new uniting idea of the hero. The hero is linked with sacrifice both linguistically and in performance. The protection of a larger body of people is made possible by sacrifice on the part of select uniting individuals therein. Figure 2 specifically uses the word 'keakkuma' in Sinhala. Though, when translated, the nearest word in English is that of 'ache,' in practice and the context therein, the Sinhala word suggests a little 'more than an ache,' inferring on a sense of service, responsibility, and duty on the part of the Nation and its people, the uniting hero therein.

In Figure 3, the visual representation of the hero is linguistically expressed, highlighting a transition of sorts from hero to heroes with the possibility of a multiplicity of heroes committed in this metaphor of unity. Thus, with such a preamble, it becomes easy for the commercial to create the intended effect. Location too plays a significant role in the intentions of the commercial, which are creatively projected with this larger sense of unity in relation to the domestic and national sphere. Each scene begins at home. The heroes are either celebrated at home, leaving home, or returning home momentarily, with the prominent symbol of home and family. It is also important to note that in nearly all scenes of the commercial, a child is focused on indicating the future of the Nation. Thus, the domestic sphere and the national sphere are intertwined creatively to suggest a merging of sorts.

While the commercial does not address ethnic diversity per se, there is a single woman in a shalwar, which may 'indicate' a stereotypical allusion to the minorities of the Nation. However, there is minimal emphasis on this aspect, where instead, the commercial focuses on common emotion and plays on relatability. Its primary focus is on separation. The heroes, with great effort, distance themselves from their families. Thus, while home and Nation are intertwined, there is a simultaneous subtle rupturing of this to highlight 'sacrifice'.

To analyse sacrifice further, textually analysing the musical vocalization (the background song of the commercial) is the entry point for this aspect of sacrifice in the uniting where the concept of the hero is overtly expressed.

(While the lyrics are available in Sinhala and Tamil, the authors attempt to translate and analyse only the Sinhala lyrics is owing to a lack of fluency in Tamil).

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The approximate translation of the above lyrics are as follows:

You are my heart, you guard my nation without letting temptation take hold of you

You are my heart, you strengthen your heart suppressing your pain for your children, you cure my nation.

You are my world; the Nation's future is mine. Let us join your cause of curing our Nation for tomorrow; it is everyone's wish; this is our cause.

Let us create unity for our Nation; the duty of curing our Nation is our responsibility (Jayakody, Weeraman, & Sinhawansa, 2020).

While much is lost in translation, it is evident that the lyrics further humanize the hero – the notion of the everyday hero working for unity in whatever capacity that contributes to nation-building at the cost of personal sacrifice is vocalized. Attributing super-human qualities are intently avoided in the nuanced curation of a humanised hero as seen, for it is the intention to highlight that professions related to mitigating and tackling the global pandemic and its effect on the Sri Lankan context are indeed the heroism in context.

## DISCUSSION

The video starts with the representation of the military. They are already in the field; the family celebrates their service from afar. There is no sense of sadness in the first scene; it evokes a sense of pride. The little boy is shown mimicking a military-like salute to his grandmother, thus projecting two categories of people the heroes are trying to protect – the younger and the older generations.

This sense of pride turns into empathy in the following scenes introducing the new group of heroes. The heroes that rise from the ordinary. These scenes showcase families, unlike military families, that which are not accustomed to ‘separation’. They are in the process of sorts, and therein the pain of separation from their families is visually made apparent. In the second scene, the small child in the arms of his father waves at his mother, a nurse, tearfully. The third scene projects how the family unit has transformed in its efforts at coming to terms with this humanised hero. Nourishment is provided by virtue of the domestic family juxtaposing this with the member's service to the more prominent family, i.e., the Nation. The small child in the scene is devising a face mask with paper and rubber bands, indicating that they are doing their part as domestic family members. The little boy puts the paper mask into the bag, hoping it would provide his parent protection, yet is prevented from running to his father for an embrace, as their position as heroes in the context of COVID-19 makes them unsafe for their families. The final scene projects the evolution of the hero and his family. The family has now embraced a stage of

acceptance. The hero (Doctor) is at home to greet his child from afar. They exchange their affection from afar; the child is reminded of her inability to hug her father. She is not tearful; she accepts the newfound domestic situation and worships her father from afar. The wife's face indicates acceptance and tragic strength as she embraces her child – in the name of nation-building and the uniting hero therein.

Thus, it is evident that the commercial creatively espouses this ideology of the uniting hero emanating from a humanised stance with sacrifice at the core. They are pitting it against the traditional role and scope for the hero in popular narratives. In line with the visuals and the visualisation process, the lyrics, by virtue of its musical vocalization project the sacrifices made by the heroes who are in turn the hitherto professionals of the Nation. The lyrics further highlight the stance of family, domesticity, and sacrifice concerning the people of the Nation, calling for the populace to be part of the cause in whatever possible manner, evoking a sense of duty and responsibility.

The choice of the commercial to focus on families to draw out heroes symbolizes the Nation as the more prominent family where those who were once not expected to put the lives of others first are now expected to do so for the Nation, as a collection of individual domestic families therein (as overtly visualized) crafting relatability.

This sense of duty and responsibility emanated through the intently creative crafting of the commercial visually and vocally contributes to the cause of nation-building.

With the setting of such a heroic concept, a 'trend' of sorts emanated with the further creation of videos attempting to enforce COVID-19 health guidelines drawing from this notion of the humanised hero. The first series of the episode was titled *Meeteren Jeewithe*, which translates to 'life from a meter's distance,' showcasing the manner in which we as a nation can contribute to the cause by maintaining our 'distance.'

Episode 1 of *Meeteren Jeewithe* projects two women in sarees wearing masks standing at a bus stand. One of them is taking a *selfie*. After getting off the bus, the other who passes by offers her the sanitizer she was using to protect herself. They both walk away, possibly to work talking in a happy manner (செய்கடமை, මීටරෙන් ජීවිතේ Episode 1, 2020).

The second episode of the *Meeteren jeewithe* series highlights the need to wear a face mask. The video depicts a 'tuition class' where the students are seated apart. They are wearing masks with emojis on them, indicating their feelings in the tuition class. The scene focuses on a male student trying to express his emotions towards a fellow female student. He does it by maintaining his distance while managing to convey the message (මීටරෙන් ජීවිතේ Episode 2, 2020).

Similarly, three other episodes were released in October 2020 under the same series. Episode 3 depicts the need to use the inner side of the elbow to sneeze by virtue of depicting a scene in a school context and the behaviour of children (මීටරෙන් ජීවිතේ Episode 3, 2020).

Episode 4, the final episode of the series, stays true to the title of the series *Meeteren Jeewithe*; the video showcases an event where the organizer reminds everyone what was indicated in the previous episodes: washing hands and wearing masks while maintaining the required distance (මීටරෙන් ජීවිතේ Episode 4, 2020).

The next series of episodes were titled *Wagakiyamu*, which translates to 'let us be responsible.' The first episode showcases an office where a high-ranking officer is on his way to have breakfast. He gets a call from an employee who has sent some work but sounds ill on the phone. The higher-ranking officer immediately excuses him and asks him to return when he recovers. The message of Episode 1 in this series promotes working from home or staying at home if one becomes ill. (වගකියමු Episode 1, 2020).

Episode 2 is set in a restaurant where all the staff are wearing masks, and the waiter who is also wearing the mask sneezes using the elbow method to do so, but in the process drops his tray. The manager of the restaurant, instead of reprimanding him, appreciates his action of sneezing properly (වගකියමු Episode 2. 2020).

Episode 3 is a scene in the bank where an elderly customer cannot find a pen at the writing booths of the bank to fill her slip. An employee of the bank (name tag is visible) advises her that she should always carry a pen as COVID-19 can be transmitted via the pen's surface. He then offers his pen to her after sanitizing it (වගකියමු Episode 3, 2020).

The final episode of the series highlights the importance of wearing masks. The scene takes place at a salon where the customer tells the owner or staff member attending to her that she need not wear the mask as it may hinder her work. The owner or the staff member, however, politely refuses the suggestion stating that her customers' safety is her responsibility (වගකියමු Episode 4, 2020).

All of the episodes of the videos of the two series were released on the 19th of October 2020. When the first lockdown was lifted where people were settling into their routines under the new normal. Videos by virtue of the commercial provide models of behaviour, highlighting the notion of humanised heroes in nation-building amidst a pandemic. The first series highlights personal responsibility, and the second series highlights the responsibilities of heads or those in managerial capacities.

The concept of the hero is not overt in these episodes as in the principal commercial; however, upon detailed analysis, it is observed that shouldering the burden of the overtly visible heroes is complemented by the individual humanised hero, in everyday scenarios in performing their duty and responsibility. The episode videos indicate how the virtues sought by the governing institution of the Nation are subtly enforced through the creation of heroes.

This study therein analyses the strategy of the creative commercial as a tool. While one may argue that the commercial avoided specific usage of symbols of religion and race, the commercial opens the discourse of the representation of race, religion, and diversity in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society in which it is aired, thus posing

a question as to whether the heroes created, depicted and crafted in their embodiments and interactions are inclusively represented, contributing to further avenues of study.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, it is evident that specific deliberation in the choices of representation has been made in creating the concept of heroes in the context of this commercial in relation to COVID-19 mitigation efforts. By virtue of this specific commercial which was deemed a success in terms of its advertising effect, the creation of a section of heroes extending the traditional is linked with a sense of duty and responsibility towards the Nation at large directing the population of the Nation to embrace the concept of a/the hero specifically.

In opting to analyse the representation of hero and Nation that seems to be continuously crafted, one must as, Homi K. Bhabha states, "begin by questioning that progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion - the many as one - shared by organic theories of the holism of culture and community, and by theorists who treat gender, class or race as social totalities that are expressive of unitary collective experiences" (Bhabha, 1994:142).

As evident in the commercial, the symbols, metaphors, and tropes employed are choices, and, in the choices, therein, there is intention and exclusion, both overt and subtle, projected creatively.

The scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture. At the same time, the very act of the narrative performance interpolates a growing circle of national subjects. In the production of the Nation as narration, there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative (Bhabha, 1994:142).

Homi. K. Bhabha further states that the 'people' of the Nation are 'neither the beginning nor the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the 'social' as a homogeneous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population' (Bhabha, 1994:142).

Thus, the analysis showcases the commercial's contribution to a discourse of the creation of the concept of a/the hero that serves the Nation through which the governing authorities' desire for the Nation is executed.

This short study therein focuses attention on Sri Lankan e-commercials and the conception of the Nation and hero, specifically in relation to discourse emanating from the global COVID-19 pandemic, where the words hero and Nation are at the forefront. Through this short study, the use of symbols, metaphors, and tropes were analysed, ascertaining as to how they are seamlessly incorporated into a discourse that seems to be based singularly on the concept of portraying the Nation as a family moulded by the likes of a newfound hero evoking a sense of duty and responsibility. With this directed portrayal complicated assumptions, exclusions and stereotypes concurrently occur.

## **THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The study analyses the '*Itukama*' commercial and its campaign in terms of its contribution to the concept of the Nation and hero and how the concept is nourished by the notion of '*Itukama*.' As discussed in preceding sections the study looks at the constructivist approach to the concept of the Nation.

According to Grotenhuis (2016), the Nation is constructed by the people depending on their identity and political beliefs this can be largely influenced by those in power. Hence the focus on the commercial that was sponsored by the government.

The concept of the hero thereby is created by those in power to influence the people to adhere to what is perceived as the Nation and influence them to do their duty- '*itukama*' to the Nation.

Thus the paper theoretically contributes to the existing discourse of the constructivist approach to the concept of the Nation through the utilization of tactics such as forms of media. The studies focus on the case of the COVID-19 pandemic and provide a historical dynamic to the research that might follow this.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

As this is a qualitative research the practical contributions of this paper are less than tactile. However, the paper provides an outlook on how media can influence the concepts that control society. The limitations highlighted in the paper where the commercial and the campaign falls short such as the focus on minority communities may influence content creators to be mindful of the impact. However, the results will not be immediately apparent.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

While the study attempts to explore the social implications of the use of certain terminology and images of a commercial campaign in relation to the Sri Lankan context of the Nation and the hero, due to limitations of time, the authors have not explored the detailed nuances of issues of race and gender representation intertextually. These aspects would be better analysed in a comparative study which is within the scope of future studies.

The study is an impetus for the textual analysis of visual representation(s) of commercials in the Sri Lankan context. The critical evaluation of visuals and texts marketed albeit in a commercial setting, in relation to the Sri Lankan context is timely, setting the stage for future critical engagements.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declared no competing interests.

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