

New Trends in Intercultural Communication Under New Conditions of Normalization in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The spread of the COVID-19 virus is a huge crisis that the whole world has had to face recently. The spread of this virus resulted in the loss of millions of lives, and Sri Lanka too felt the effects of it. Almost every nation on the globe has now implemented a variety of health regulations to safeguard citizens from the COVID-19 virus. Accordingly, the purpose of this research study is to identify whether intercultural communication strategies were used to control the spread of COVID-19 and new communication trends under normalization in Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic cultural country. COVID-19 can be considered a health and cultural crisis. Attention was given to examining how the media behaved throughout this period as well as how to inform people by transferring knowledge between cultures. During the study, the data were collected by studying media reports, using literature and the Internet. Consequently, it was feasible to determine how cultures worked closely during the period when the new normalization conditions were implemented, compared with the period people lived before. It was emphasized that the usage of intercultural communication can be identified through measures taken by the government that do not obstruct communication between individuals with different religious, cultural, and social backgrounds as well as individuals from one linguistic community. This study concluded that intercultural communication, which the government of Sri Lanka, as a multicultural state, successfully implemented for proper communication with its inhabitants, was helpful in overcoming cultural crises to a considerable extent.

Keywords: Intercultural; Communication; Sri Lanka; Normalization; COVID–19.

INTRODUCTION

Cultures can be "understood as a system of symbols and meanings that are disputed even by their creators, which have no fixed boundaries, which are constantly changing, which interact and compete with each other." The equivalent Sinhala term "Sanskruiti" (CULTURE) is derived from a participle noun "TI" with the suffix 'KRU' preceded by the prefix 'SANS', deep meaning of preparation or evolution can be taken as etymological definition of this word. E. B. Tylor in 1676 defined Culture on a sociological and anthropological basis. In his book "Primitive Culture" defines culture or civilization as a complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, morals, customs, any other manners, and abilities of man as a person living in society (Taylor, 1876). A similar definition is presented by Lundburg and Martin who say that 'culture consists of the full of human habits, people, ethics, rituals, customs, social institutions, and the set of symbolic, non-symbolic characteristics, specific signs (Lundburg and Martin, 1985). In

accordance with these definitions, it is fair to say that culture as a full of social product, an asset, or a social resource. It is also a fact that culture is a comprehensive accumulation of human habits and abilities that have been assimilated from the beginning by joining with various cultural elements and moving forward in a new form.

It is very important that the public sector is well versed in every culture and ethnic characteristics in order to lead their country politically. A leader who lacks a formal understanding of the needs, customs and traditions of the people he governs will not have the right to accept the objections of the entire nation. There he or she cannot be called a true representative of the people. It is because of these cultural clashes between the ruling and the governed classes that foreigners managed to establish Sri Lanka as a colony from the distant past. John Doyle, who understood this weak situation better, was recognized by the Lankan public because he had a keen knowledge and understanding of the language, culture, economic and social environment of the country. In 1815, he was a key character and made a great contribution to the British rulers while making Sri Lanka their colony (Lankadeepa, 2019). In addition, understanding the culture of each country is an important factor in maintaining political relations between countries around the world. No state in the modern world exists as an isolated state. That is why the Russian Federation, which is one of the most powerful countries in the world, keeps itself and a few friendly countries on its sidelines. If so, then for the progress of any country, it must have relations with other countries, identifying the cultures of those countries make a great contribution to the development of international political relations. In the past, political relations basically developed through missions, migrations, or trade relations, and the use of mass media made a significant contribution to the precise definition of global cultures.

Gradually, the various cultures in the world are interfered with mass media, communication, the initially uniquely identifiable cultural situation begins to become more complex and complicated, as cultures mutually diversify within the framework of globalization. Traditional culture, folk culture, classical culture, popular culture, media culture, global culture, etc., especially based on media and communication trends, cultural categories tend to arise, and more cultural complexities develop due to modern cultural trends. In such an environment, it is important to recognize the cultures of other states, respect those cultures, and provide the necessary support in the implementation of customs and rituals. For this reason, it is extremely important to maintain the right relations between representatives of intercultural. Otherwise, racial, and religious differences will escalate, and disunity will spread between nations. The human need called communication, cannot be maintained without a process without a certain culture, the communication would not exist. For all these reasons, in any social context, it is important to achieve communicative aspirations with respect to multiculturalism.

According to Shereen (2020) COVID- 19 appeared at 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 March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). In the context of this pandemic, the convergence of mass media has a greater advantage in the rapid dissemination of communication content around the world. Measuring media convergence is an essential tool for sharing information and gaining knowledge that people can use to obtain reliable information. This helped to increase the media audience during the quarantine period in Sri Lanka. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the media quickly became an important communication tool in Sri Lanka. The study determined the cross-cultural communication of the media during quarantine in Sri Lanka. Because the media has become an effective source of information and trustworthy information among every citizen of Sri Lanka.

METHOD

The study was conducted as a quantitative study using quantitative data collection methods. A questionnaire-based data collection tool was used as a quantitative survey method. The sample size is 50 media users, and they were selected as a probabilistic convenient method for conducting an online survey to determine the use of media during the COVID-19 period in 2020 in Sri Lanka. Statistical analytical methods are used to analyze the data, which are used to determine the effect of intercultural communication among Sri Lankans during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Quantitative data is analyzed using EXCEL software. As secondary data, books, articles and links on the Internet are used to determine the results of the study, and were also used to formulate the theoretical and empirical basis of this study.

For the practical part of the study, survey data as the primary source, messages, billboards, audio recordings of telephone conversations, etc., were used to obtain practically significant results. As a secondary source, published academic papers related to COVID-19 were consulted. Accordingly, the data obtained from the study of primary and secondary data were observed. In order to achieve the above research objectives of the study, a broader literature review was conducted, including a desk research strategy in addition to the author's rational thinking and observations. The author chose the duration of the review for six months, starting from January 2020 to July 2020.

The goal here was to study how people representing different cultures work to overcome the spread of the Covid virus. correspondingly, the focus was mainly on media reports and how they are effectively perceived by those cultures. In addition, attention was paid to how Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslim people communicate with each other and how people work based on different religious beliefs. Thus, based on the data obtained, it was possible to draw some conclusions about the new trends that could be observed during this period.

DISCUSSION

As for the typical use of the sample, it will determine the results of the data analysis of the media user questionnaire "How to use the media for intercultural communication during the COVID19 quarantine in 2020 in Sri Lanka". These research data are presented in numerical form. It was analyzed how many of them participated in the number. Firstly, the result indicates the background of the media respondents who were selected as a probabilistic method of convenient sampling. Figures 01 and 02 graphs were prepared according to the collected data. Therefore, 12 out of the 21 Sinhalese nationalities who participated in the research have used the newspaper to get information during the spread of the Corona virus. 21 received information from television, 19 from radio and 17 from billboards. 18 through phone recordings and 12 through phone messages have received awareness related to Corona disease. In addition, 18 people have received information through public relations programs launched by the government. But 18 out of 18 Tamil national data contributors have received information through television and only a few have received information through messages received on the phone. It is 05 people out of 18. They have also minimally obtained information through telephone recordings. The 11 who handle the English language seem to be mostly associated with the media. They are all associated with television, radio, telephone messages and public relations programs.

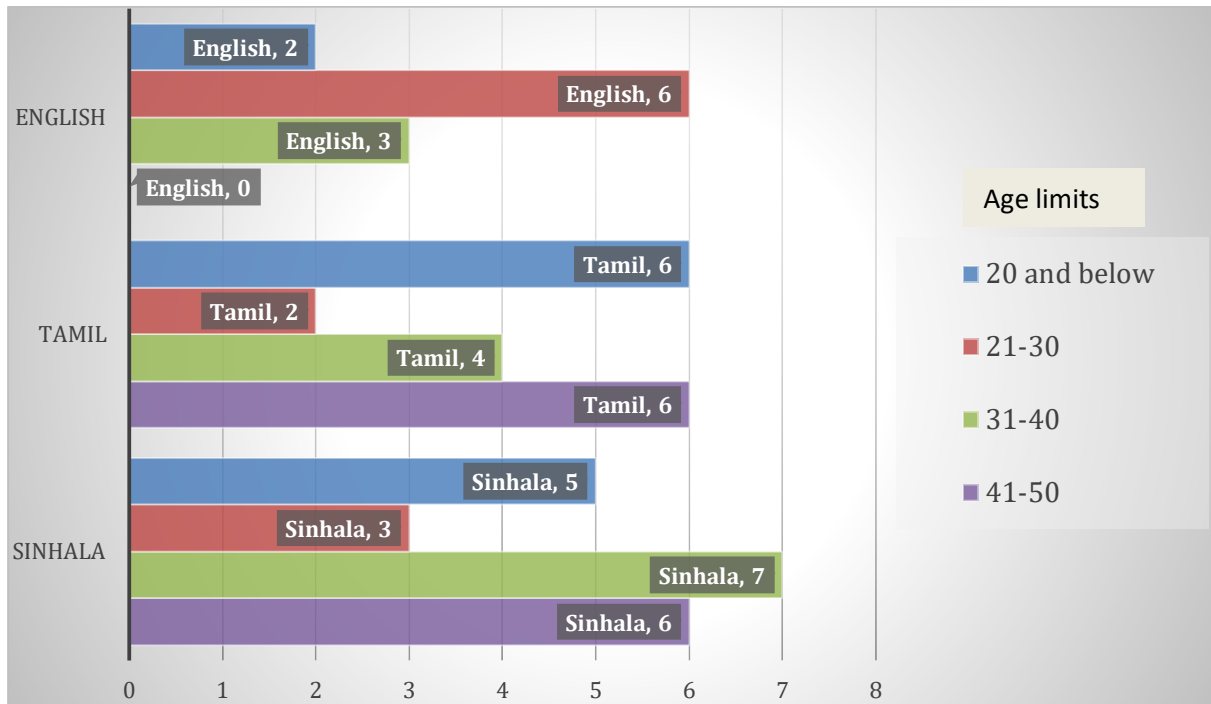


Figure 01-Participants according to their language and age limits.

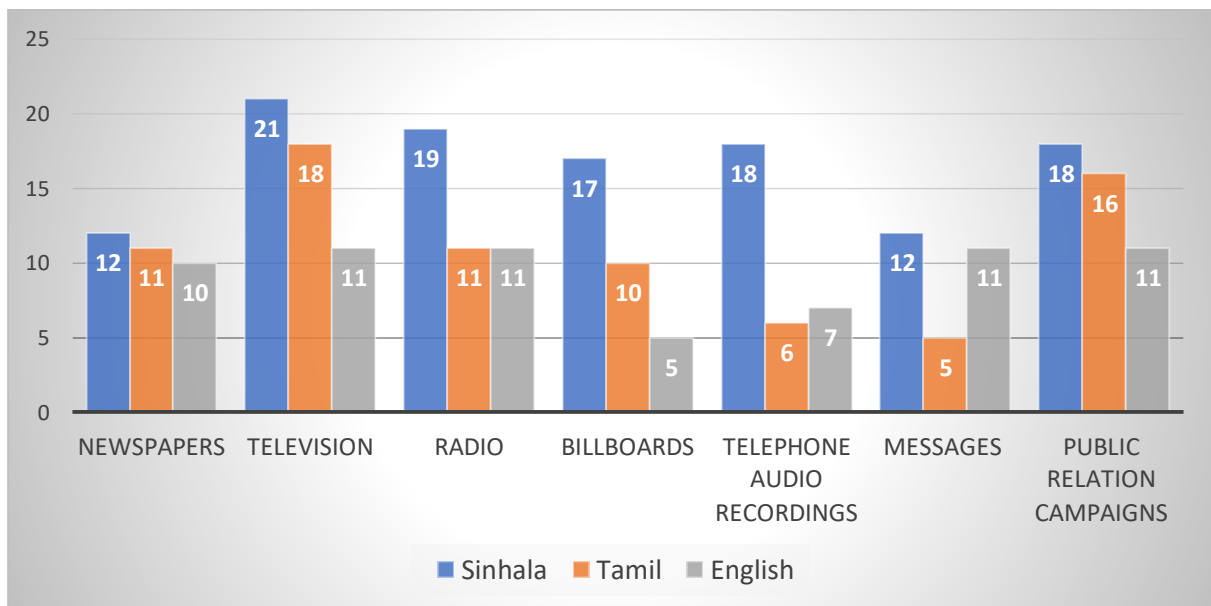


Figure 02- Participants according to their communication channels during covid 19 period.

Considering that until intercultural communication is carried out correctly, the existence of public administration, state agencies, non-state agencies, etc. are stable. If not, then we can expect national disunity, instability of the state, people expressing their disagreement with the actions of public representatives, etc. Therefore, people's representatives should be sure that they address the people correctly in any kind of crisis situation, such as cultural, social, political, or economic in the country.

The concept of media convergence has become the main concrete tool for information exchange in this pandemic situation due to the isolation of the whole world (Jinasena and Weerasinghe, 2022). Intercultural communication is capable of gaining an understanding of how culture undergoes various changes, human actions and understanding, cultural changes,

cultural characteristics, and activities. In today's extremely interconnected and extremely divided world, intercultural interaction has become a characteristic feature. Even in developing countries such as Sri Lanka, where they have limited access to international travel and communication, people get everyday opportunities to interact and communicate across national borders for various reasons (Tennakoon, 2015).

Intercultural communication is a key tool that helps people adapt to the world around them. In fact, when intercultural communication becomes a mutual understanding, which is exchanged between two or more cultural parties who participate in the communication process of their respective culture's basis of national diversity, especially cultural and communicative patterns of behavior that arise between these parties due to that understanding, helps in understanding and forming attitudes. In addition, in cross-cultural studies, there is a curiosity to get acquainted with other cultures. Based on this reason, public representatives are working to develop and implement public policies that are suitable for everyone living in a multicultural society, paving the way for a peaceful society without ethnic crises. The most important feature of the Athenian system of government was not a body consisting of the whole people (citizen body), but a political system that was designed by officials and magistrates who were officially responsible to the body of citizens and accountable for its governance. The particularity of the method of representation employed in this strategy is significant (Atukorala, 2013).

Therefore, when distributing various information about the coronavirus epidemic, public representatives should work to fulfill the role of a true representative of the public in order to maintain an appropriate type of communication between cultures. Representatives of the people are working to create this concern by transmitting their ideas to people, considering communication between each other without status due to linguistic and cultural categories that existed and arose between cultures at the national level in connection with the epidemic situation, considering it with the help of intercultural research. As has already been done, the media has also become cautious about press releases with political decisions that are socialized through these media outlets. This is because racial differences can grow unconsciously due to the socialization of messages specific to one race and one religion.

Many countries around the world have developed health policies aimed at protecting against coronavirus or any other that may face in future, depending on the cultural, social and economic conditions of each country. Pandemic-related health policies are developed and implemented primarily by provinces under the leadership of the Department of Health of Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada (Adeel and Catalano, 2020). Cross-cultural studies can be used to study intercultural human activities as well as social behavioral patterns. It is also possible to explore the way and how human relationships, which are subject to changes, are mutually active in the communication between the respective cultures. People's representatives who are directly or indirectly involved in the work of making laws from the people's sovereignty may see opportunities to represent the religion, race, or caste to which they belong, but it is obvious that they are not real people's representation. Thus, the representatives of people naturally have the ability to create an excellent working order to help people read the cultural expressions of a human being so that they can live and accept the various cultures encountered in intercultural communication. To do this, understanding of interculturalism provides some additional strength. In addition, in the event of an emergency in a particular country, as well as in times of national attention, we are forced to consider the balance and changes between culturally diverse groups of the population due to this intercultural communication. Also, since the day when the epidemic situation with COVID-19, which is currently intensifying in Sri Lanka, began to influence the country, to inform people, to take precautions, to control the spread of the epidemic and constantly raise social awareness in this regard by promptly implementing the action plan initiated by the government. It is important

to study how communication is mediated, specifically by intercultural communication. It is very important to pay attention to cross-cultural communication when transmitting various types of information in this regard, especially language and culture – oriented. Thus, to take care of intercultural communication, it is necessary to study the communicator's information linguistically and from a cultural perspective in the emerging epidemic situation. In such situation,

1. Conducting discussions with the public in such a way that all ethnic groups are represented, and not just communicating with a part of the population belonging to the same culture.
2. Communicating accurate and relevant information with the entire population, not just to those who belong to the culture that helped them come to power.
3. To support the enforcement of appropriate laws.
4. Expressing their opinion about the absence of laws and regulations that should be enforced in some cases if injustice is inflicted on society.
5. Making sure never to make racist insinuations.

By focusing the attention of public representatives on these issues, people in society become flexible enough to change some incompatible cultural elements in their cultures. It is important to properly transfer information between different nations in order to ensure health safety during the coronavirus epidemic situation. This is a modern phenomenon. If this is the case, then it seems to have become important to pay attention to language or to take a close interest in linguistic intercultural communication in order to gather information about this epidemic situation and to communicate among the public. Language is the main carrier of culture. The language is used by one person or a group of people to transmit their information, knowledge, etc., to another person or group of people. In such a multiracial country like Sri Lanka, knowledge of other ethnic languages besides the native language is extremely important for intercultural communication. By having a good understanding of each other's unique languages during communication, it has been possible to accurately convey the desired message to the targeted groups of people. The second process in political public relations is information management. Every democratically elected state should communicate with its citizens. Information should be provided to communicate with them. Information is the most powerful weapon in politics. The dissemination, restriction, or distortion of information chosen by the government to bring to the attention of the public is an important aspect of public opinion management (Tomic and Grbavac, 2016).

It is shown below is an excerpt from the book of Political Public relations, written by Tomic and Grbavac 2016, which were used as secondary sources of research. Government officials should conduct their communications in such a way that it has a minimal negative impact on them. Accordingly political leaders should respect the following,

1. Maintaining effective relationship with their target audience.
2. Protecting the reputation of the government or public representatives.
3. Maintaining a timely communication process.
4. Working to maintain relationships that are beneficial to the people and themselves, so on McNair (McNair, 1995) points out that this is important to do.

From the beginning of the spread of the coronavirus epidemic in Sri Lanka until the middle of the year 2021, medical recommendations to survive during the epidemic, symptoms, recommendations to be followed when infected with the disease, issues to be taken care of in the period after the disease, circulars concerning quarantine rules, in case of violation of quarantine rules, a lot of information about how to act and behavior and so on, were communicated between each other. Moreover, the spread of the epidemic situation, the number

of infected patients, the number of registered deaths per day, the information about people who have recovered and left hospitals, etc., as well as all national and international information about the epidemic situation are updated daily, especially when communicating this information to the public. It is extremely important for a multinational country to pay special attention to the language. In the past, even the spread of epidemics could be controlled to some extent by the widespread dissemination of accurate information among the population. For example, we can note the active contribution of the media to the fight against the spread of influenza epidemics. The reason for the success of this project was that the relevant information was translated into various languages and circulated around the world.

When virtual communities consist of members with similar backgrounds who may or may not know each other, it has been found that they can retain a pre-existing cultural identity (Shuter, 2017). Visual media can communicate with people and their cultures. For the preservation of cultures. Visual media can be used both for the development of cultures and for the transmission of cultures to future generations. Television programs used as primary sources used for research are special here. During the coronavirus epidemic, local media organizations, especially television channels, broadcast news programs in three languages: Sinhala, Tamil, and English, at different scheduled times of the day for the entire recipient community. It can be noted that on the day when more Covid clusters were registered at the Brandix garment complex, Minuwangoda in last year, which led to the creation of the second wave of Covid in the country, instant information was broadcast on many television channels in the country at the same moment in all three languages. Thus, being in the field of intercultural studies, further research in this regard can be understood further by taking examples from newspapers, radio channels, and various programs. It can be seen here that media organizations have contributed through two aspects of surveillance and intervention.

The Ministry of Health has published special information related to the Covid disease, especially with regard to measures taken at the state level. As for the health sector, twelve quarantine centers, testing centers and thirty-one public hospitals have been specially established, which are specifically designed to treat those infected with coronavirus. Medical personnel will be subjected to both physical and psychological stress when providing care to patients during a pandemic of this magnitude (Ministry of Health, 2020). Thus, early measures to combat emotional burnout will ensure better provision of services during this difficult period and ensure the safety of health workers by providing special guidelines for practical application (Ministry of Health, 2020).

It is also very important to give advice on how to protect yourself from the coronavirus during phone calls by broadcasting audio tapes in all three languages. In the past, we have seen how an audio tapes were played continuously until the concerned subscriber accepted the call. It is noteworthy that the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (TRCL) and telephone network companies jointly launched this program. Accordingly, it is a new experience to prepare a counseling program related to such calls, even in an epidemic situation, thinking about the community of recipients. But even in such a program, the motivation to use language as a means of communication in general has made a positive contribution to the regularization of intercultural communication.

Another example is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many public service institutions, private institutions, electricity bill payment centers, schools, supermarkets, religious shrines, and public places such as highway entrances have displayed important messages and information bulletin boards to protect people from the epidemic situation, which proves how powerful role the mass media and communication terms act in specific situations. It is remarkable in cross-cultural studies that they are presented in such a way that they can be read as a whole not only for one linguistic society, but also for people with linguistic diversity in

accordance with the different religious roots of society. For example, it is significant that general instructions related to the coronavirus epidemic (washing hands before entering, wearing face masks, keeping a one-meter distance, etc.) are mentioned in all three languages in transport centers, banks, supermarkets, public service institutions, private service institutions, etc.

In addition, it can be pointed out that instructions such as "keep one meter distance" are displayed on the same noticeboard in all three languages on the sides of highways, sidewalks and traffic lights. This, even if it is very little information about the language, the ways of communication in general with a multinational community, should be the subject of our special attention in cross-cultural studies. In order to avoid human relationships and selfish feelings that are collapsing due to the epidemic situation, there should be good communication among the people of the society. Intercultural studies have focused on how to build mutual understanding between two different linguistic societies that have always been linguistically separated. In this regard, linguistic differences between each other will be important when communicating of information. In addition, it is very important to be concerned about this at the state level in the field of intercultural communication.

Apart from this, the fact that English words related to health, which were widely used during the epidemic, came into use in Sinhalese and Tamil – speaking societies in general, more effectively influenced the work of mutual communication. For example, words like “COVID – 19, coronavirus, quarantine, vaccine, symptoms, pandemic, isolation, social distance, lock down, mask, sanitizer, PCR test, rapid antigen test” can be pointed out. Furthermore, the communication of information with a good understanding of multiple religious cultures is also a unique feature that can be seen during this period. As a feature of the culture itself, the tendency towards religious issues was thought to have been used in an extremely controversial manner during the corona epidemic period. It is necessary to critically study such events, which are communicated even through mass media with a general religious background, as important in intercultural communication as well as how they are communicated in a multicultural environment.

Moreover, during this period of normalization, it can be seen that information is brought to people through various religious and cultural functions in order to avoid the sad situations that arose due to the Covid epidemic at different times on the island. For example, an independent Sri Lankan TV channel, which was used as a primary source, shows not only various rituals, religious services, and sacrifices conducted by only one cultural party to combat the corona virus, but also how other multi- religious cultures are working to combat the epidemic. There were times when people generally believed in the beliefs and worship of God, which were extremely popular in Sinhalese and Tamil societies. For example, we can point to Nawagamuwa Pattini Devi Pooja (ITN – 2020), which was broadcast on the Independent Television Channel a ritualistic and ceremonial worship program of the Load of God mentioning different aspects, mainly in this case, blessings from God and health for the country and the nation.

When reviewing the information communicated by the mass media about the burial or cremation of the bodies of those who died from COVID-19 during the period when the COVID epidemic spread strongly, we found that the cremation side, and not the burial side, was highlighted based on cultural issues and religious background, and not to alleviate the situation (BBC.COM, 2020). There was no communication of information in order to create mutual understanding between other cultures about the cremation of sick corpses, and it seems very important to understand the ideological differences that arise in cross-cultural studies. According to the recommendations of the World Health Organization, Covid corpses, although there is no burial problem, this ideological conflict can be seen in situations created by the mass

media and in situations created by various parties (interagency standing committee, 2020). And also, widespread propaganda from some media channels tried to advertise some different types of illegal medical syrups that can be used to protect against the coronavirus epidemic (Amarasa, 2020).

The study identifies the use of social media by Sri Lankans during the covid pandemic. This is an important discussion about the use of social media by multicultural people in Sri Lanka. Social networks have made it possible to easily share information with everyone through social networks. Social media has given everyone the opportunity to share information with everyone else during this crucial period (Kent, 2020). In this way, such new trends in intercultural communication were evident during the period of normalization, throughout which the spread of the Covid virus took place. In particular, it was found that the influence of the mass media is primarily responsible for the formation of these trends. Social media activity also stood out strongly. Accordingly, in this study, it was clear that there was a period when people living in each culture, they created closer working environments by using their cross-cultural effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study allowed us to determine how people of different cultures in Sri Lanka are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a health crisis that the whole world has to face. In particular, the characteristics of intercultural communication were more prominent under these normalized conditions compared to the usual period. It was seen how people representing multiple cultures work with different beliefs. But the most important thing here was that people from multiple cultures and working environments become more closely together. That is, it can be recognized that they communicate by exchanging ideas with linguistic and cultural understanding. Here, social networks, as well as the mass media, advocate the dissemination of multiple cultural ideologies. Accordingly, it could be recognized that intercultural communication is a very important approach during the spread of a virus or pandemic situations. It is also clear that the identities of different cultures can be studied through human deportment, behavioral and cultural characteristics.

Thus, according to the data obtained, we can determine that new people gathered on social networks during these days of the pandemic in Sri Lanka. It was clear that the advertisements supported by media organizations were also focused on protecting their customers from covid-19, rather than on business benefits and sales. Especially popular actors and actresses in Sri Lanka, cricketers, etc. sought to inform society about the severity of the disease, strategies to protect against the disease, disease prevention, etc.

Also, conclusion can be drawn from the practical survey is that in Sri Lanka, which is a Sinhalese-speaking society, during this Covid epidemic, everyone was able to connect to communication activities, regardless of race and language. It is obvious that cross-cultural communication in Sri Lanka took place properly during the Covid period. Generally, daily media telecasts, movies, cartoon programs etc. were temporarily stopped and discussions were held in Sinhala, Tamil and English with important people related to disease prevention such as specialist doctors, Ayurvedic Sinhala doctors, expert nurses etc. It is clear that the urgent need of awareness has been done. In particular, this period could be recognized as a period in which the process called compilation of instructions, which is a major function of the mass media, was carried out properly. Because on other days they were concerned about achieving their strong commercial goals and did not pay attention to the health of the public. Its specialty is the manipulation of languages to communicate to cover all cultures.

Markusen and Gadwa also suggest focusing on affordable ownership and more efficient use of Section 37. Finally, improved data collection and monitoring can strengthen the links between different stakeholders (Millward Associates, 2017). Bou-matar (quoted in Smith, 2004) warns that it is necessary to pay increased attention to the representation of cultural identity and pluralism in art by those who are in political power. A comment about excessive attention to showing individual points of view, because it homogenizes personal experience (Weston, 2019).

Communication through the media also played a very important role in fueling the racist struggle that began in this country, especially with their request to allow the corpses of Muslim peoples to be buried. It is obvious that the spread of friendly communication between representatives of different cultures in this country was also caused by the efforts of the media to constantly convey messages to people that promote friendship between races, preventing the spread of racist ideologies that were formed through social networks. The Sri Lankan Government has played an important role in preserving and expanding the cultural space. The mass media have enormous power in shaping social and economic development through intercultural interaction.

From the point of view of Covid-19 policy, studies have revealed a number of policy approaches to expanding the use of cultural space. This policy is important for conducting early consultations with the cultural community to determine the cultural connection. A productive way forward is Metzger's work (2011), which argues that one should move from "planning for culture" to "planning with culture" through collaboration between planners and artists, using culture and art to support the planning process and undermine bureaucracy. Accordingly, during the COVID-19 epidemic, some conclusions can be drawn mainly due to the control of covid carried out by people's representatives in Sri Lanka, considering multiple cultures. During the coronavirus epidemic period, it was recognized that intercultural communication is a very important approach in terms of time, as well as the fact that it can be experienced through intercultural communication in various conditions or different backgrounds based on human response, behavior, and cultural characteristics. Even in the context of the coronavirus epidemic, many holistic approaches related to intercultural communication can be explored through this, and the government's intervention to alleviate the Covid epidemic in an intercultural environment can be praised to some extent.

The media make a huge contribution to ensuring that Sri Lankans continue to lead a normal life in the face of the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020. During this period, more and more people were associated with the media, and they depend on the influential influence received from the media. Most people have adjusted their daily routine according to the media. For example, one good example of what they learn from the media would be home gardening. Thus, the conclusion of the study determines that during the COVID19 quarantine pandemic in 2020, a huge impact occurred in Sri Lankan society. Accordingly, this study confirms that Sri Lankans tend to treat the media during the quarantine period due to COVID-19.

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