

The Use of Social Media for Private Higher Education to High School Students in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Marketing is an important part of a company's operation in revenue generation. Marketing in the private higher education (PHE) is no different with any other companies. At the turn of this era, there is no denial that social media is one of the most cost effective method to reach a vast group of people at the shortest period of time in comparison to other available marketing channels.

With the rapid growth and revolution in the social media helped catapult by the easy access to internet, the advancement and availability of mobile devices, social media marketing has become an infinite way to reach the huge customer base in Sri Lanka. Despite the fact that the growth and development of social media assisted by the factors that support the growth and usage of mobile devices and development of ICT, many PHE in Sri Lanka are not realizing the full potential.

Understanding the reasons of such gaps and the factors affecting the growth and development of social media would be very useful for the marketing arms of the PHE to make use of social media to reach the target market at the relatively lower cost ratio.

The purpose of the research is to find out how PHE in Sri Lanka could use social media marketing to tap into their target market. Surveys are done with the high school students to understand their social media behavior. In the findings, we have found out a number of very useful information such as the peak period of the day, what are their favorite social media, what are the applications in the social media that they use the most and including the usage of the people closest to them. These information can be used by PHE to plan their online marketing.

Keywords: Social media marketing, higher education, high school student, promotion, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Social media is defined as "A group of people of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow that creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 is a new version of World Wide Web where there are cumulative changes in the way the web pages are made and used (DiNucci, 1999 & O'Reilly, 2004). Merriam-Webster defined Higher Education as "Education provided by College or University". The definition of Higher Education Institutes in Sri Lanka as quoted by University Grants Committee Sri Lanka; "Higher Educational Institution" means a University, Campus, Open University, University College, or Centre for Higher Learning established or deemed to be established under the University Act". The target market are high schools graduates from Grade 12 and 13.

Social media involves the usage of online media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google and others social media to reach their customers base. There are also social media groups that are created for specific reasons. This technology helped many companies who are trying to reach their market to do so specifically towards the right target market. Though the formula behind how the mechanism has yet to be revealed to the users by the social media creators, the potential of marketing using this channel is very huge (Perdue, 2010). Same concept applies to higher education industry where their target market consist of young and dynamic minds who are usually techie inclined and as such very highly to have one or more social media accounts (Hawkins & Frohoff, 2010). Social media marketing can be used exponentially to market the PHE to the target market mainly the high school students in Sri Lanka and beyond the country.

There are 10,505 schools in Sri Lanka consisting of government schools, semi government schools, private schools and Pirivenas. The target market for the private higher education comes from the pool of students from private schools due to their level of tuition fee and affordability as the states provide heavily subsidized education (Ranasinghe & Hartog, 2001). Majority of the Private Schools are located in the Colombo City. The Government School Census 2006 shows that there are 1,353 government schools in the Western Province alone and 113 have elements of English in the curriculum. There are 70 private schools in Sri Lanka

and 18 are Fee Levying Schools and the rest is Non Fee Levying schools also known as semi private schools. 38 of the 70 private schools are located in the Western Province alone. Out of the 38, there are 29 private schools in the Colombo City which are the surveyed target market.

A random search on the internet on the 50 relatively bigger PHE in Sri Lanka with some foreign affiliations reveals that majority are not using Social Media to the fullest. Some has duplicate and inactive Facebook accounts, the News information was not updated timely as well as poor reach to the target market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Country Overview

The island of Sri Lanka is once called Ceylon, lies strategically off the southeastern coast of the Indian Continent in the Indian Ocean. This country consists of about 65,610 sq km of land including several small islands and about 980 sq km of inland of water and a 1,340 km coastline. North to south, Sri Lanka is 435 km long and 225 km wide. Sri Lanka is a unitary state with a democratically elected legislature and an executive presidency. The country is divided into 9 provinces consists of 25 districts that are subdivided into 325 divisions of 14,013 Grama Sevaka divisions. Each Grama Sevaka division contains 5 to 6 villages and 250 to 300 families. Local government consists of municipal, urban, semi urban and rural councils that operate under the provincial councils.

On 2001 census, there are estimated 20.5 million population in Sri Lanka consists of majority 73.8% Sinhalese, 7.2% Sri Lankan Moors, 3.9% Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils at 4.6% and other ethnic groups at 10%. Estimated 80% of the total population lives in the rural and semi-urban areas. Majority of the population is Buddhist at 72% and balance consists of Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. Sinhala, Tamil and English are the major languages with 92% of the population are able to converse in Sinhala, while 81% can read and write that language. 15% of the population can converse in English while 19% can read and write it. Literacy is fundamentally important to the ability of the user to access information. Information literacy is defined as the ability to determine what information is needed, where to access that information and evaluate it and its sources, and then how to use it effectively is fairly low with the general population. Focus group discussions and interviews with stakeholders confirmed these findings (Senevirathne & Gunawardena, 2004). E-literacy levels in the sample were also low.

The Beginning of Social Media

The history of social media can be divided into 3 eras; from 1969 to 1993 (before the dawning), 1994 to 2004 (dawning) and 2005 to present (after the dawning) (Curtis, 2013).

First email was delivered in 1971. Computer today was not the same as before. In 1978, two Chicago computer hobbyists started bulletin board system to share news, announcements and information via postings with relatively small community. For the first time, in 1979, the bulletin board was used to connect Duke University and University of North Carolina. In 1989, the invention and birth of World Wide Web by a British engineer Tim Berners-Lee at CERN. World Wide Web was donated to the world in 1993. The growth was revolution after with. Geocities (users can create own website) was created and then was close down with only limited access to Japan. Yahoo started search engines. The web had 1 million sites in 1997 and at the same time blogging started. The year after, Google started the major search engine and indexing. Year 2000 was the burst of dot.com bubble. 2001, Apple came into the market with the first iPod and continue to introduce new products along the years which created a different perspective in the computing world.

2001 to 2004 is the period of the birth of many social media such as Wikipedia, Friendsters, MySpace, LinkedIn, Facebook, Flickr and others. There are a number of new social media that were created, some successful such as YouTube and some which didn't become popular as they wanted them to be such as Bebo. From 2005 onwards, the growth of social media was revolution. By 2013, YouTube registered 1 billion users monthly with 4 billion views per day. Facebook user topped 1.11 billion users. Twitter had 500 million registered users. Some of the number of registered users and activities in the popular social media are astronomical. Social media are sites in the internet where people interact freely, share and discuss information about their lives, using multimedia mix of personal remarks, photos, videos and audio. To define the term properly, let's break it down and define media. Media is a tool for communication, example newspaper, radio or television. This regular media is usually one way where it is used to communicate a certain message. It has very limited opportunity for you to feedback your thoughts. On the other hand, social media is 2 ways which allows you to give your thoughts.

Types of Social Media

Social media encompasses a wide array of online resources and it is impossible to discuss all the different types of social media here. In general, there are 6 types of social media (Tim, 2009) as below.

- **Social Networks:** These are services that allow people to connect with one another of similar interests and background. They consist of personal profile, the ability to add friends, photo albums and various methods to be able to interact with other users and set up groups. Generally, social network falls into 2 sub categories: popular and niche. Very popular social network such as Facebook that has currently million of users. These are general purpose social network that appeals to the masses. Another example of a popular LinkedIn which targets all types of professionals.
- **Social News:** These services allow users to post news or links to outside articles and allow its users to vote on the posted items. The items that get the most votes will then be displayed most prominently. The group can decide then which news items get to be seen by more people. The most popular are Digg and Reddit.
- **Bookmarking Sites:** This is similar to social news site but the value to the users is that users can save, organize and manage links to various websites and resources online. Some allows the users to tag the links to make search easy to find and share. These are often confused with social news because both help users to find interesting and useful contents. The most popular sites are Delicious and StumbleUpon.
- **Media Sharing:** These services allow the users to upload and share media such as photos and videos. There are usually additional social features such as profiles, commenting, etc. The most popular are YouTube and Flickr which allows users to upload their video and photos is very influential.
- **Microblogging:** These services allow user to send short updates or news that are pushed out to anyone who subscribed to online account. The most popular is Twitter.
- **Blog Comments and Forums:** These online forums allow members to have a conversation by posting messages. There are many popular blogs and forums.

The different type of social media may overlap each other in the various features they may have. In a more comprehensive study, there are more than just the 6 groups of social media mentioned above (Mirna, 2010). There are 15 types of social media categorized by their functions and features available to the users as shown the Appendix 1.

ICT

Sri Lanka ICT is not as relatively developed. A population of close to 21.4 million (2012) in Sri Lanka and about 666,357 in Colombo the Capital City of Sri Lanka, there are about 3.2 million registered internet users (June 2012) which is about 15% penetration with about 1.5 million Facebook subscribers (Dec 2012) which is about 7.1% penetration making it number 73 in the ranking of all Facebook statistics by Country.

For a better understanding on the extend of internet users involving ICT in Sri Lanka, we compare with the similar population number such as Taiwan which has a population of 23 million (2012), they have about 17 million internet users (May 2012) which is about 54.5% penetration and close to 13.2 million Facebook subscribers (Dec 2012) which is about 57% penetration.. The same, comparing to another develop country such as Singapore with a population of 5.3 million (2012), there are about 4 million internet user which is about 75% penetration (June 2012) and close to 2.9 million Facebook subscribers (Dec 2012) which is about 54.5% penetration.

Appendix 2 shows relative comparison with some developing and developed countries in terms of the internet usage in terms of their country population. Appendix 3 shows relative comparison with the rest of the world. The world internet penetration is about 34.3% in compare to Sri Lanka which is at 15% penetration rate.

The development of ICT started off late due to the civil war in the country, the development of ICT faced stumbling blocks before the civil war ends on 17 May 2009. Transparency in the government acquisitions and low level of managerial knowledge about ICT capabilities are the 2 main reasons of the stumped growth of ICT during the civil war (Alan, Sam & Jayantha, 2002).

In the past 3 to 4 years, the growth for Internet and E-mail Subscribers on both Fixed and Mobile has been tremendous as shown in Appendix 4 especially on the mobile devices. The development of ICT overall had catapult the usage of social media among internet users. The growth and development of ICT leads to the growth of internet usage which also leads to the usage of social media. The growth of mobile devices has been also the key factor in contributing to the growth of internet that promotes the usage of social media.

The growth of the usage of internet with the popularity of social media is driven by mainly 2 channels which are the service providers which provide affordable mobile plans and the introduction of affordable mobile brands to the market. Sri Lanka is placed under 51st position in terms of total number of mobile cellular subscribers at 17,359,000. As at March 2011, the penetration rate In Sri Lanka was estimated at 84% over a population of over around 21.3 million. There are 5 main service provider s which are Dialog, Mobitel, Etisalat, Airtel and Hutch. Majority of internet users are between the ages of 15 to 25 with an internet usage as high as

26%. There are also a number of strong mobile cellular brands in Sri Lanka such as Samsung, Nokia, Huawei, Apple and others.

Governance

Adaderana News (The Nation, 2014) and other local media reported about the suicide death of a young girl due to Facebook. The front page news on "The Nation, Sri Lanka" titled "Facebook Conundrum" (Maneshka & Rukshana, 2014) reported on the impact of social media on the society and the need for the government to relook at how and what social media impact on the society. Mass Media and Information Minister of Sri Lanka, Keheliya Rambukwella has said that while social media networks like Facebook has its value, a strategy is needed to address its adverse impact especially on youth. In a media release, the police spokesperson SSP Ajith Rohana said that the unit will handle incidents related to Facebook and take action if a crime has been committed. CEO of Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team/Coordination Center (Sri Lanka CERT/CC) Las Das had reported that the cyber crimes have increased tenfold with over 2,000 complaints mostly related to social media. Spokesman for SLCERT/CC, Roshan Chandraguptha said that last year alone, there are 1,200 complaints relating to fake accounts on Facebook and another 30 were complaints pertaining to cyber crimes that were registered to the police.

There is no clear definition of regulatory and policy on social media in Sri Lanka currently. Social media arena and policies governing them are relatively new in Sri Lanka. There was a draft National Media Policy that was proposed in 2007. The draft had proposed 14 key policies which are used as a guide by other by-laws to govern in the event there is a major breach. There are much debates and arguments by local parties and in the International arena of freedom of speech, reporting and journalisms. The key policies will come to play when there is abuse by users that is perceived to a national threat to the country stability. The guide on social media marketing is subject to the government statutes such as civil law in the event there is a slander, criminal law in the event there is a fraud and many others.

Communication in the social media has different characteristics than communicating face to face or in other forms of communication aided by technology such as on a telephone, fax or mass media. Communication via social media can reach a very much wider audience without boundaries and at lightning speed. The communication is also unique that it is interactive as compare to radio, television which is a one way communication and usually restricted to a selected number of audience. The information could exist to all and be in that space virtually forever for those relevant to access to.

These became very important and powerful tools which needs accountability. Reporting in online and off line media including printed news requires editorial ship, censorship and guided by many number of bylaws and statutes to prevent abuse or threat to community and national security. But it seems just to post a thread onto say Facebook or to Tweet doesn't need any censorship board or permission from any authority. There are no governing rules of what can and cannot be posted onto the social network except only if the statement infringes the privacy agreements set by the social network or someone bothers to make some complaints, take actions and then the complaints are then attended to by the administrators of the social media. Anyone could virtually say anything in the social network and stay anonymous without accountability. Users can stay anonymous when they do unlawful or unethical things without the thoughts about accountability. People are more open to say things without any form of control or restraint since they are anonymous. Such individuals can communicate without an identity, using pseudonyms or even using another person name or identity. Unlawful impersonation can happen and the individual could enact unlawful and unethical actions. The process of identifying and convicting criminals became more difficult and long winded. Anonymity also creates problem on the integrity and credibility of individual (Johnson, 1997).

Culture

Sri Lanka is a country with a strong background of traditional and conservative way of life. The way of life is influenced by many factors. Its past history of civil war, its Buddhist heritage, the influence from South Indian, influences from the colonization of Portuguese, the Dutch and British. Social activities are widely not encouraged for the female counterpart. It is a country predominantly a male gender biased. It is a way of life to usually see more male Sri Lankan having a beach party, social events and activities rather than the female counterpart. These societal behaviors have been inherently cultivated in the mind of the people for many years due to many factors from the religion, conservative culture and belief system and society in general. The level of conservativeness belief differs in different locations and provinces. Society living in the bigger cities are relatively more open minded than the one in the smaller cities. The level of conservativeness also differs sometimes due to the level of education and awareness, occupations, district or provinces affected by the past war (Freeman, 1997). A research done by Freeman on 438 respondents show such deviation on social value of the Sri Lankan.

The past labor statistic shows that out of the 16 million plus Sri Lankan above 20 years old, 35% is female relative to 75% male are in the work force. The study made by Dr Freeman on 438 Sri Lankan respondents showed that the society in general still possesses the traditional value that women are perceived to be homemakers and men are the bread winners. This belief differs widely in the urban and sub urban society where the tolerance for women to hold a position in the workforce is higher in the former.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

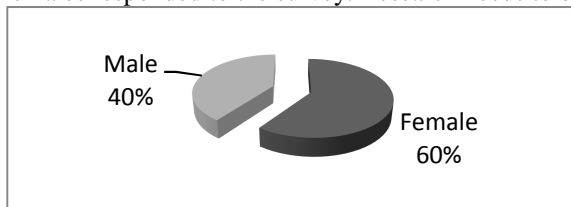
Data Analysis of High School Students

The target population is all the private high schools students in Colombo. There are approximately 14,806 'A' level students registered for the exam in Colombo. The population for the survey is all the 29 high school students in grade 12 and the sample frame needed is 368 (Cohen, 1969). The names of the 29 schools located in Colombo are as shown below in Appendix 5. The database was provided courtesy from an anonymous international institute collected through their marketing activities. The questionnaires were sent to the 8,750 database available from the 29 high schools students and had a response rate of 3.4%.

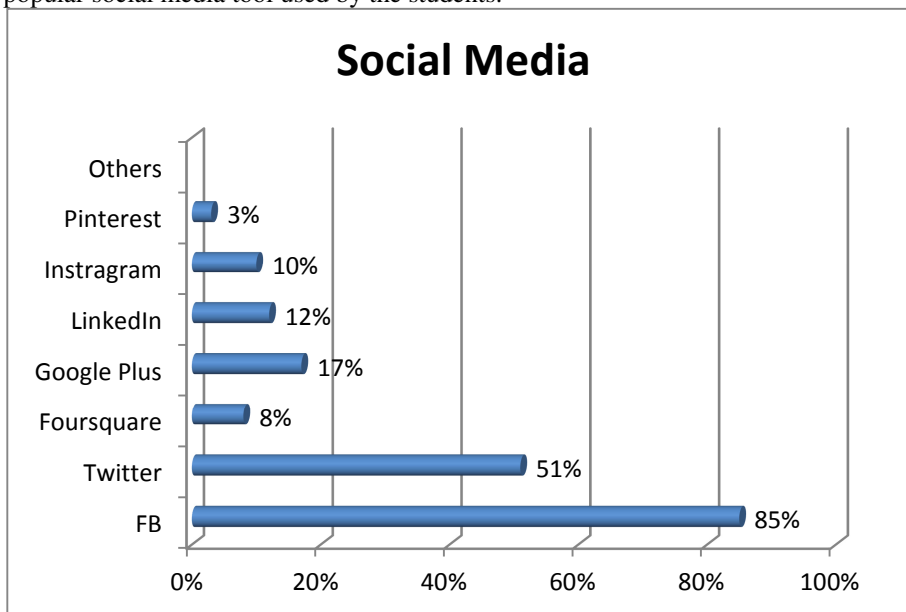
The summary of the 5 key findings from the 297 valid questionnaires are shown in Table 1 and all the findings in Appendix 6.

Table 1: Summary of the 5 Key Findings from 297 Valid Questionnaires

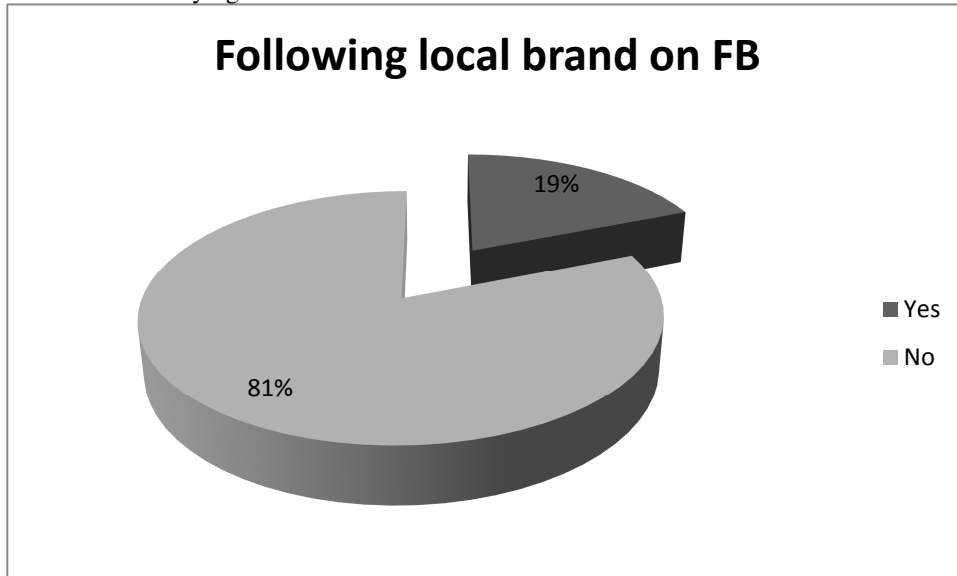
GENDER: More than half of the respondents were female, 180 out of 297. There are varied reasons why more females responded to the survey. Research needs to be done why such.



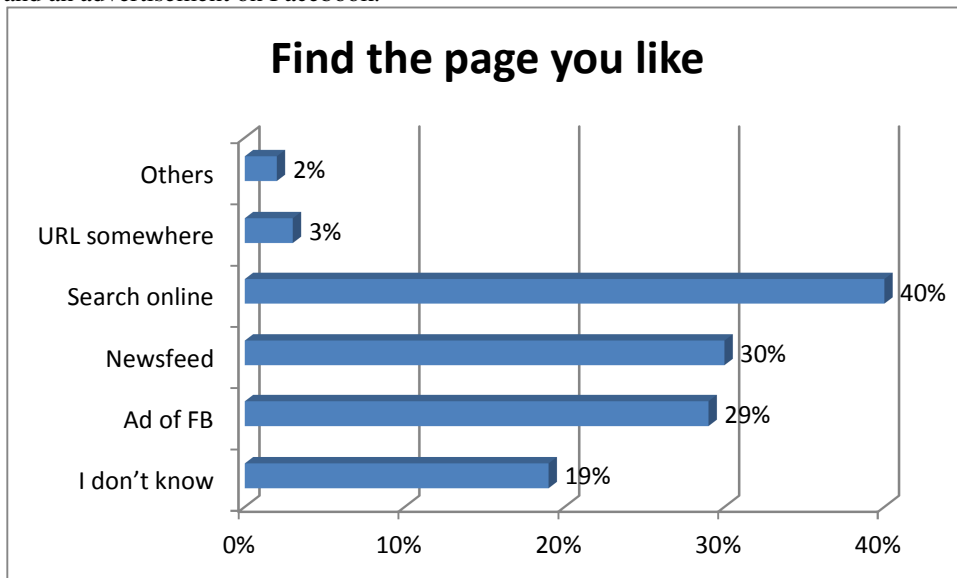
SOCIAL MEDIA: 84% of them have a Facebook account with half have a twitter account. Facebook is the most popular social media tool used by the students.



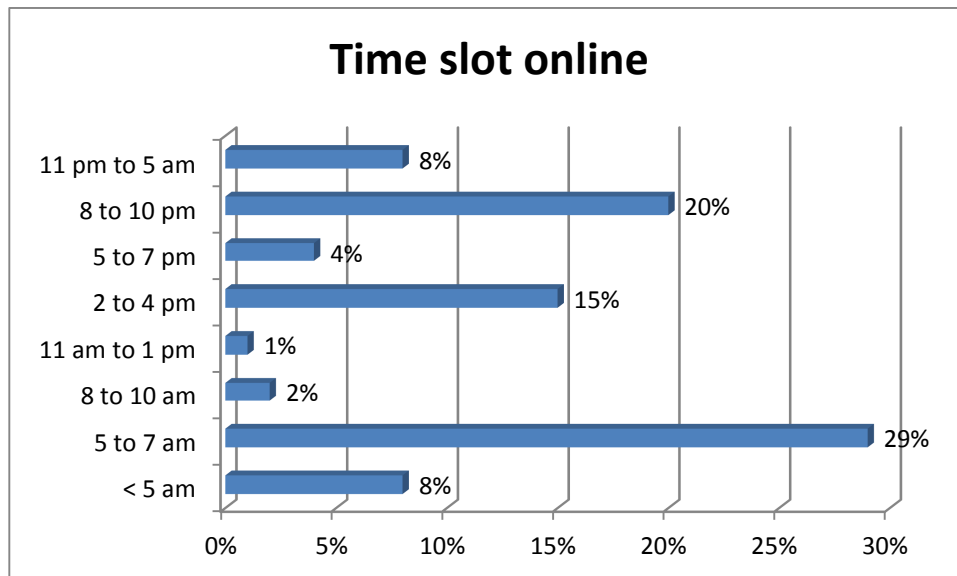
FOLLOWING ON FB: 81% doesn't follow a brand on Facebook but 40% are influenced from a friend on Facebook on a buying decision.



TYPE OF FOLLOWING: 40% search online for pages they liked with most of them following on the newsfeed and an advertisement on Facebook.



PEAK PERIOD FOR ONLINE: There are 3 time slots popular for the respondents to go online which is 5 to 7 am, 2 to 4 pm and 8 to 10 pm. This information is important for social media marketing.



CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

Sri Lanka is a country of traditional background of religion and conservative way of life. There are 3 main factors that affect the use of social media among the high school students and PHE in Sri Lanka namely ICT, Governance and Culture. This trend is changing with the younger generations due to the education process which exposes them to the different way of life outside of Sri Lanka. The youths at the high schools are now adopting relatively more modern life in the way of socializing. Social media is one of the popular methods to socialize. With the growth of social media encouraged by the growth of ICT and catapult by aggressive service providers such as Dialog, Etisalat, and others on the internet services not only to the urbanized area but also rural areas, all these trend are showing the same direction that once a developing nation is going towards. For PHE not to use this platform will be a lost to them. The time will come when the people will be living social media for example in the developed places such as Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong where social media is a way of life for friends to keep in touch of each other in addition to socializing face to face. We have seen these trends happening in many of the developed countries where friends socialize face to face with each other over public cafes while keeping in touch with others on the social media at the same time. The cyber socializing happening in our daily life example travelling from one place to another, dining in a restaurant, in the toilets while checking out Facebook, etc. It is very much visible evidence say taking a trip in a public transport in Sri Lanka compare to a public transport in Singapore. You will evidently see most or not all are engross on their smart phones in a public transport says in the trains and bus rides and similar from Colombo city center to say down south during rush hours. Sri Lanka has not yet peaked in terms of usage of social media relative to the other developed countries. Understanding the variables of the equation will help very much for the PHE to be able to use this platform to the fullest to reap maximum rewards. These information and the trends social media is growing towards will be the evidence where the policies makers, private sectors and businesses could use for effective decision making process.

Further research needs to be done on many of the sub areas example genders behavior usage towards social media, urban/sub urban, etc which can provide the needed information for an efficient development of the country.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to acknowledge the following persons for their willingness to provide validation feedbacks: Prof Dato' Dr Md Gapar Md Johar and Dr. Nalin Abeysekera. We would also like to thank you the Head of High Schools namely but not exhaustive; Mdm Elizabeth Moir, Dr. Egerton Senanayake, Mdm. Anitra Perera and Mdm Goolbai Gunasekera.

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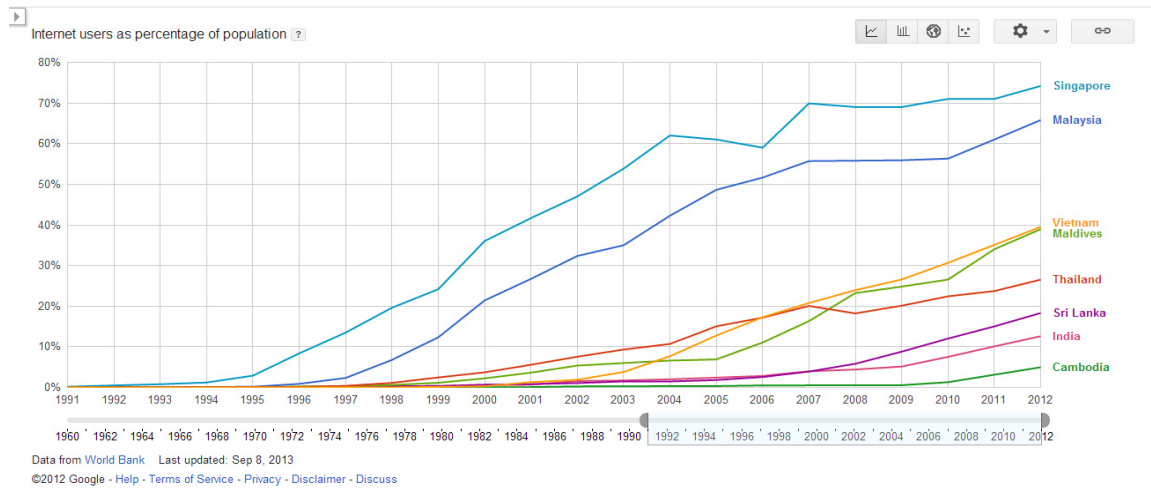
APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Types of Social Media (Mirna B. 2010)

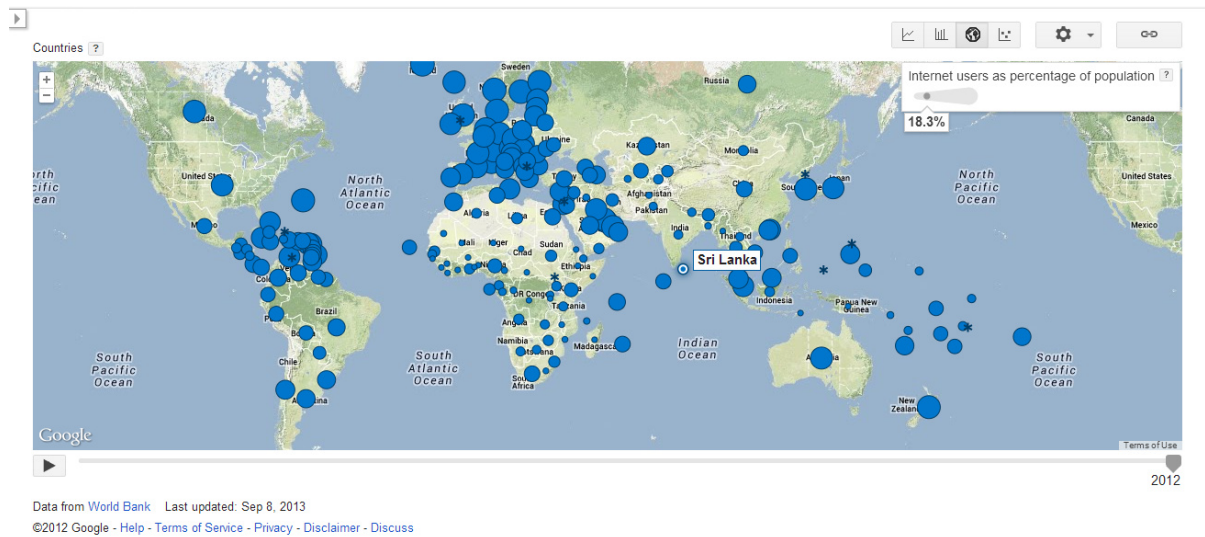


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Appendix 2: Internet Users as Percentage of Population:-Sri Lanka with other Countries around the Region (Google: World Bank. 2012)

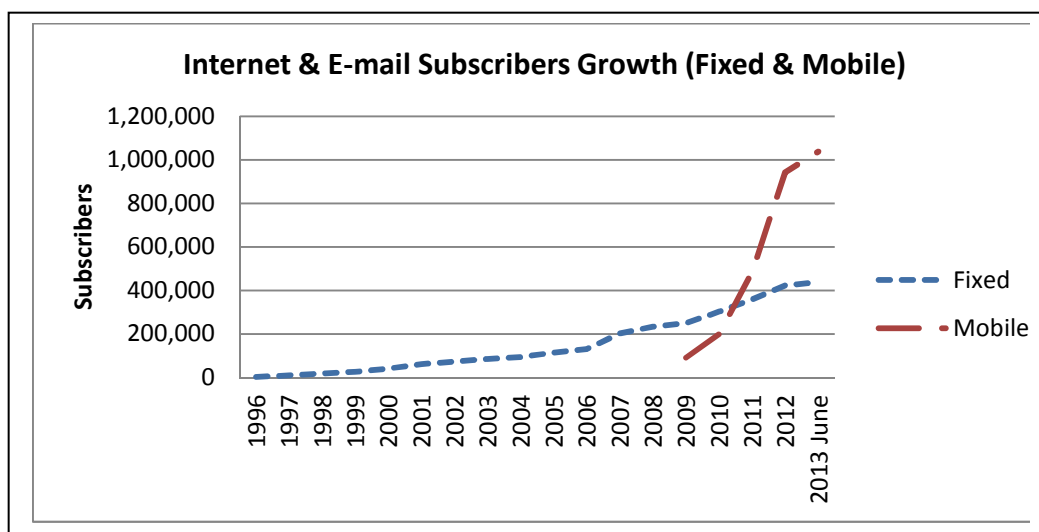


Appendix 3: Internet Users as Percentage of Population: - Sri Lanka with the Rest of the World (Google: World Bank. 2012)



Appendix 4: Internet and E-Mail Subscribers for Fixed and Mobile (TRC, June 2013).

Year	Fixed	Mobile
2001	61,532	
2002	73,468	
2003	85,500	
2004	93,444	
2005	115,000	
2006	130,000	
2007	202,348	
2008	234,000	
2009	249,756	91,359
2010	302,000	200,000
2011	359,000	485,000
2012	423,194	942,461
2013 June	437,725	1,037,901



Appendix 5: Names of 29 International and Private High Schools in Colombo (Sept 2013)

No	School Name	No	School Name
1	Lyceum International School	16	Gateway College
2	Stafford International School	17	Louvre International School
3	Asian International School	18	Harcourts International School
4	Wycherley International School	19	St Bridget's Convent
5	Elizabeth Moir School	20	St. Thomas' College
6	Belvoir College International	21	Ladies College
7	The British School in Colombo	22	St. Joseph's College
8	The Overseas School of Colombo	23	St Peter's College
9	American International School	24	Bishop's College
10	Ilma International School	25	Methodist College
11	Leighton Park International School	26	Holy Family Convent
12	Alethea International	27	Musaeus College
13	Oxford College International	28	St.Lawrance School
14	Royal Institute	29	Good Shepherd Convent
15	Colombo International School		

Appendix 6: Summary of the Key Findings from 297 Valid Questionnaires

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR HIGH STUDENTS IN COLOMBO			
Summary of Survey in Percentage (%)			
1	Gender	Female	60%
		Male	40%
2	Social Media	FB	85%
		Twitter	51%
		Foursquare	8%
		Google Plus	17%
		LinkedIn	12%
		Instagram	10%
		Pinterest	3%
		Others	
3	Read newspaper	Yes	30%
4	News Update	SMS	12%
		Print Media	30%
		Online	71%
5	TV Time/week	< 1 hour	5%
		1 to 2 hours	8%
		3 to 4 hours	82%
		> 4 hours	4%
6	Times log in	> once/week	2%
		few times/week	3%
		1/day	8%
		2 to 3/day	17%
		4 to 5/day	37%
		6 to 7/day	15%
		> 8/day	12%
7	First time to use FB	In bed	7%
		In toilet	1%
		Breakfast	41%
		Travelling to class	49%
		In class	2%
8	Language on SM	English	61%
		Sinhala in Eng	45%
		Sinhala in Sinhala	13%
		Tamil in English	28%
		Tamil in Tamil	19%
9	Mobile or PC	Mobile	19%
			27%
			10%

			8%
			2%
			5%
			11%
			5%
			3%
		Computer	5%
10	Married/Single	Single	100%
		Married	
11	Current	Student	100%
		Not working	
		Working part time	4%
		Working full time	
12	School block?	Yes	100%
		No	
13	Use SM while driving	Yes	2%
		No	98%
14	Following local brand on FB	Yes	19%
		No	81%
15	Interact with local brand on FB	Frequently	12%
		Once in a while	14%
		Prefer	30%
		Not at all	44%
16	Update brand on FB	Yes	40%
		No	60%
17	Update from a Friend	Yes	29%
		No	71%
18	Local brands followed on FB	None	54%
		1 to 5	27%
		6 to 10	5%
		11 to 15	3%
		16 to 20	2%
		21 to 25	1%
		26 to 30	1%
		> 30	1%
19	Find the page you like	I don't know	19%
		Ad of FB	29%
		Newsfeed	30%
		Search online	40%
		URL somewhere	3%
		Others	2%

20	Visit restaurant, I follow?	Foursquare	7%
		Facebook	20%
		Google Plus	17%
		None	27%
21	Social media is?	Much less effective	5%
		Less effective	8%
		As effective	12%
		More effective	30%
		Much more effective	45%
22	Followed brand, visit their website?	No	12%
		Maybe for a few	30%
		Occasionally	15%
		Always	12%
23	What would you do next when brand is interesting?	Ask online	19%
		Call direct	5%
		Visit	8%
		Others	4%
24	Time slot online	< 5 am	8%
		5 to 7 am	29%
		8 to 10 am	2%
		11 am to 1 pm	1%
		2 to 4 pm	15%
		5 to 7 pm	4%
		8 to 10 pm	20%
		11 pm to 5 am	8%
25	Parents on FB?	Yes	56%
		No	44%
		NA	
26	Children on FB?	Yes	0%
		No	0%
		NA	100%
27	Boss your FB's Friend?	Yes	
		No	
		NA	100%
28	Favorite online chat on your PC	FB chat	54%
		Gmail chat	40%
		Skype	12%
		Others	Yahoo
29	Favorite chat on your mobile	GB chat	61%
		Gmail chat	14%
		Skype	4%
		Whatsapp	22%

		Viber	15%
		Others	Yahoo
30	Applies to you	Click on FB Ads	41%
		Click on websites	12%
		Never	6%
31	Ex bf/gf is a friend on FB?	Yes	64%
		No	33%
32	Mobile platform	Android	54%
		Apple	30%
		Windows	15%
		Blackberry	2%
		Java	15%
		Others	

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