A Descriptive Analysis on Digital Behaviour of Young Adults in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT: *The internet and digital device usage has become an integral part of everyone's life and among them majority are young adults. Ease of access to digital devices, availability of the internet facilities and prominence given to Information Communication Technology in education system are the contributing factors towards this trend in Sri Lanka. Thus, this article explores the general profile of the young adults reflecting their practices towards the internet and digital device usage. In accordance with this aim, digital behaviour of young adults related to the internet consumption and digital media platforms usage such as frequency, time spent, type of content followed, viewed and subscribed etc. are illustrated. Subsequently, research findings reveal that the majority of the young adults who pursue either secondary or tertiary education, log on to digital media platforms in a daily basis by their smart phones (91%) through consuming personal mobile data (90%) and they log in to online platforms while travelling. Furthermore, the frequently accessed digital media platforms are Facebook (98%) and YouTube (93%) and mostly accessed in between 6-8 am and 6-10 pm. At the same time, this study discloses that youth's perception and conduct towards pre roll and pop-up advertisements are not satisfactory since they often skip pre roll advertisements and do not access information provided by the pop-up advertisements.*

KEY WORD:*Digital behaviour, digital natives, social media, the internet usage, young adults*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Digital behaviour can be defined as any activity that a person engages online. This consists of the devices they use, the sites they visit, paid advertisements they engage with, the pages they navigate to, time they spend on different platforms etc. (Perceptive Customer Insights Team, 2018). However, in early days, digital behaviour was restricted to the usage of the internet and digital devices for official communication purposes and information sharing. But, with the availability of smart devices such as tablets, mobile phones and laptops it has become a functional tool which plays a major role in everyone's life irrespective of the age, gender and geographical location.

Nevertheless, statistics shows that, digital literacy of youth is significantly high compared to other age categories. As stated by Rushkoff (1996), youngsters are often considered more future oriented, technologically aware and interested than adults. According to Ling and Yttri (1999) this is due to the early adoption and adaptation to technology and youth been provided with resources and basic training regarding Information and Communication Technology in early stages of life. Thus, the concept of "digital natives" is commonly used to explain youngsters who are aged 15-24, who are born during the digital age and growing up using ICT and been active online for at least five years. In 2012, 5.2% of the total world population were considered as digital natives, which accounts for 30% of the world's youth population (International Telecommunication Union, 2013). However, digital nativism is not a uniform phenomenon, but differs according to location and circumstances in different countries.

According to Pew Research Center (2019), the internet usage among the youth in USA, which represent the age category of 18-29 is 100% and it is the age category, which shows the highest the internet usage. Furthermore, 99% of them owns mobile phones as at 2019. As stated by Joshi, Stubbe, Li and Hilty (2019) youth is using technology to communicate through texting, tweeting and chatting, play online games and share their ideas through posting in different internet portals such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram etc. Similarly, in Sri Lanka youth which consists of 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 age groups have the highest digital literacy accounts for 76.6%, 77.9% and 71.1% respectively as at June 2019. Subsequently, majority of those

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who are computer literate have received training from school/university and private institutions accounts for 53.4% and 21.9% respectively (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2019). Thus, it is evident that Sri Lanka is also following the global trends with regards to digital behaviour.

Kaplan, Waste, Wood-Harper and DeGross (2004) define digitalization as the digital transformation which generates changes in all the aspects of human society (Udovita, 2020). Subsequently, the digital behaviour of youth in Sri Lanka is growing significantly. Thus, there is a growing need of identifying the digital behaviour of youth in Sri Lanka for market research as well as academic research. Therefore, this paper will examine the digital behaviour of youth in relation to service providers and data package usage, digital device usage, frequency of using digital platforms, reactions to online advertisements etc. Furthermore, digital behaviour among young adults in different countries will be elaborated as well.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Bashir, Mahmood and Shafique (as cited in Deniz &Geyik, 2015) many surveys have been done on the internet usage globally and it is evident that the internet usage is most prevalent among the youth as well as the educated people. The usage of internet and social media is growing sharply in the past few decades and the social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram increasingly rooted into the forms of daily communication (Nanayakkara& Dissanayake, 2020). As stated by International Telecommunication Union (2017), the proportion of young people aged 15-24 using the internet is significantly higher than the proportion of the total population using the internet (i.e.71% Vs 48%). Furthermore, as suggested by Eurostat (2017), in 2016, 91% of the young people in the Europe Union daily use the internet, compared to 71% for the whole Europe Union population. As per the findings of Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka (2019), digital literacy among Sri Lankans aged 5-69 years is 44.3% as at June 2019 whereas among them 20-24 age group has the highest digital literacy rate (77.9%) followed by 15-19 age group and 25-29 age groups which accounts for 76.6% and 71.1% respectively. According to Rajapaksha&Thilina (2019), the annual growth of Sri Lankan internet usage and social media usage in 2017 was 7% and 22% respectively and 96% of Sri Lankan internet users are using Facebook. Thus, it is evident that the internet usage among youth is relatively high compared to other age groups irrespective of the country.

When considering the digital device usage, among the 5-69 years old digital literate population in Sri Lanka, usage of desktop/ laptop, smartphones, tablet computers, feature phones to connect to the internet/email accounts for 25%, 70.9%, 2.2% and 1.9% respectively. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the usage of mobile phone and computers to connect to the internet/ email is the highest among the youth which represent the age category of 15- 29 (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2019). Similarly, International Telecommunication Union Report (2013) shows young people, in particular, were accessing the Internet via mobile phones, which accounts for 76% as compared with 51% of the world population.

According to Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zichuhr (2010) wireless the internet use rates are especially high among American young adults (18-29 years old). Of the total 66% of them, own a laptop or netbook, while 53% own a desktop computer whereas young adults are the only age group for which laptop computers are more popular than desktops. According to Eurostat (2017), 82% of the young people (defined here as those aged 16-29 years) has used the computer on a daily basis in 2013. However, it has slightly reduced to 79% in 2015, possibly due to the increase in smart phone and tablet usage. Therefore, it shows an upward trend among youth in switching to portable digital devices when connecting to the internet and performing tasks which requires a digital device.

Nevertheless, since digital behaviour has increased significantly, the amount of time people spend in front of the computer screen is increasing. Thus, according to Common Sense Media Inc. (2015) American teenagers (13- to 17-year-olds) spend an average of six and a half hours on screen media per day. Furthermore, as per the statistics of Eurostat (2017), at least 95% of the young people aged 16-29 years in Luxembourg, Estonia, Finland, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Germany, Latvia, Malta and the Netherlands uses the internet on a daily basis whereas, counties like Portugal, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Greece, Poland, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia has a low average rates of daily the internet use (i.e. between 57%-64 %). According to Kumar and Kaur (2006), a study done among 945 engineering undergraduates in three states of India, 36.7% student's daily use the internet. Accordingly, it is evident that the frequency of using the internet by youth daily varies with the state of development of the countries.

In recent years, the Internet has become a central arena of activity for youth, which caters information needs, interpersonal communication, entertainment needs and social needs. (Prashanthi , 2017). According to Chen (2020) top three social media platforms used by13-17 years olds in the USA are YouTube (85%) Instagram (72%) and Snapchat (69%) while Facebook (51%) is no longer the dominant social media platform. However, Facebook (79%) is the second highest social media platform used by 18-29 year olds preceded by YouTube (91%). Similarly, as stated by Nielsen (2017), the time spend on YouTube is higher than Facebook or Netflix when considering the global trends (as cited in Guruge, 2018). It is evident that the reason for the higher

usage of the internet for educational purposes is due to the quick access to government documents and scholarly articles, ease of work and ability to save time (Deniz &Geyik, 2015). Furthermore, Chaffey (2020), 31% of the youth who are in between 16-24 years discovers brand/products via ads on social media, while that is the age group which has the highest percentage compared to other age groups in 16-64 years as well as the global percentage which is 27%.

III.   METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design, Population and the Unit of Analysis

The study falls in to positivism paradigm and it is a cross sectional study. Further, the study is a quantitative study since the researcher aims to gain insights about the digital consumer behaviour of Sri Lankan young adults. The research process is structured and formal where a survey method was adopted. In this study, female and male young adults living in the Sri Lanka was taken as the population and therefore unit of study is an individual.

3.2 Sampling Technique and Sampling Size

The purpose of taking a sample is to obtain a result that is representative of the whole population being sampled without going to the trouble of asking everyone (Fisher & To, 2012). In this study, any young adult aged between 15-24 years, who is perusing either secondary or tertiary studies and living in any district in Sri Lanka is considered as the sample. Accordingly, this research study is undertaken to examine the digital behaviour of the young adults in Sri Lanka. Since considering the entire population is not practical, a sample of 200 is extracted through convenient sampling. The results generated from this sample is generalized into the whole population in order to identify their digital consumer behaviour. However, sample is not a perfect representation of the population due the budgetary constraints, time constraints and the limitations in scope.

Furthermore, two hundred and ten individuals completed the survey while the yielded response rate was 95% after performing the quality checks. Two hundred and ten individuals completed the survey while the yielded response rate was 95% after performing the quality checks. The target population for this study was the individuals who are perusing secondary or tertiary education who are aged between 15 years to 25 years.

3.3 Data Collection and Measures

Primary data is the new data which is added to the existing pool of social knowledge that are collected for a specific research in hand by implementing the procedures which fits best for research problem (Hox & Boeije, 2005). This particular study has used primary data to a significant extent in order gather facts about digital consumer behaviour. The researcher has used a questionnaire as the data collection tool for collecting primary data and the data was collected through a survey with a description which contains the research objective and the nature of the respondents. The survey was developed with the help of prior research, literature review and administered via the internet through Google forms. The researcher personally conducted the survey with the help of field investigations covering all the districts in Sri Lanka.

The participants were asked to answer questions related do their behaviour in the digital platforms and the survey collected demographic information such as gender, age, occupation, civil status etc. Since the questionnaire was administered via Google forms, this provided the researchers with a greater opportunity in collecting quality data due to anonymity of the respondents being preserved and the actual target audience was achieved as this is related to the digital behaviour of young adults. The questionnaire was carefully designed, that the questions could not be skipped. In order to obtain error free and usable data, the researchers checked for missing data, outliers, input errors, and other errors. The data was cleaned and analysed with the statistical software packages, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Percentage analysis and bar charts were used to analyse and interpret the data. The findings of the study were presented using descriptive statistics. Based on the students' responses to the questionnaire, the following tables and bar charts were formed.

IV.   DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic Data

Table 1: Gender Distribution of the Sample

Gender	Count	Percentage
Female	104	52%
Male	95	48%
Total	200	100%

According to Table 1, majority of the respondents are females. Furthermore, since this survey was conducted among young adults the sample consists of individuals who are between 15-24 years. Since the researcher aimed at collecting data from the individuals who are perusing secondary or tertiary studies, all the respondents were unmarried.

4.2 Internet Consumption
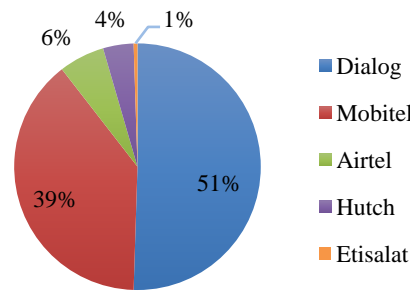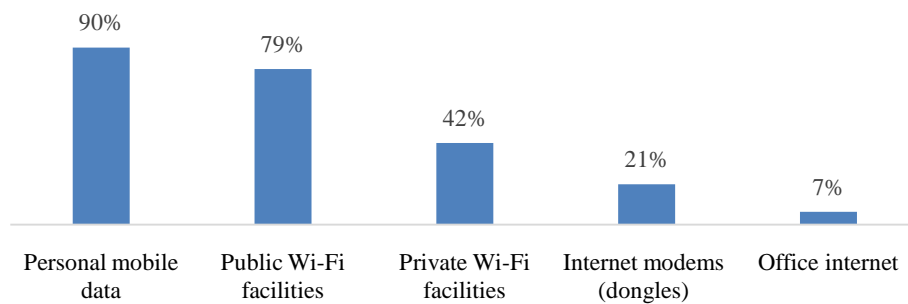
Figure 1: Internet Service Providers

Figure 1 shows that half of the sample use Dialog as their internet service provider. The rest 50% has been distributed among the other four service provided while Mobitel is leading with a sample of 39%.

Figure 2: Method of Accessing Internet

According to Figure 2, out of the total sample, majority use personal mobile data (90%) and public Wi-Fi facilities (79%) to access internet followed by private Wi-Fi routers (42%). However, internet modems (dongles) are used by less than one fourth of the sample. Furthermore, 14% of the sample use only one method to access internet whereas only two and three methods are used by 34% and 53% of the sample respectively. In addition, among those who use only two methods and three methods to access internet, 94% and 76% use personal mobile data along with public Wi-Fi facilities respectively.

Figure 3: Night Data Usage
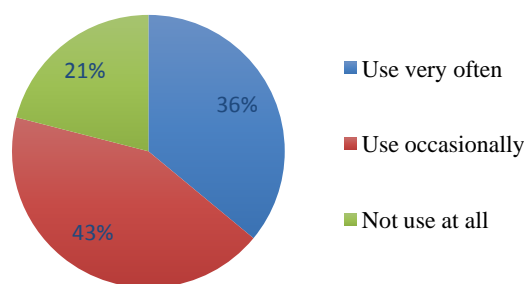
As shown in Figure 3, out of the sample less than half of the respondents use night time data whereas more than one third use night time data occasionally. Furthermore, one in every five does not consume mobile data at all.
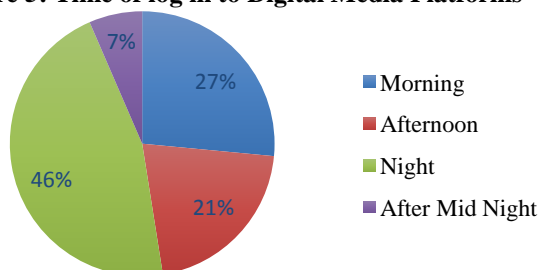
4.3 Digital Media Platforms Usage

**Figure 4: Device used for Log in**
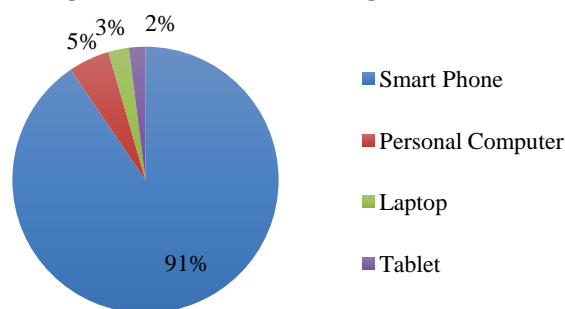
It is obvious that young adults use their smartphones to log in to digital media platforms, which is above 90% of the sample. Subsequently, the rest 9% of the sample use their personal computers, laptops and tablets to access digital media platforms where the minimum is through the tablets.

Figure 5: Time of log in to Digital Media Platforms

As per the Figure 5, most of the young adults log in to digital media platforms during night before sleep followed by morning and afternoon. Least percentage, which is 7% log in to digital media platforms during late night to consume night data.

Figure 6: Activities Done While Accessing Digital Media Platforms
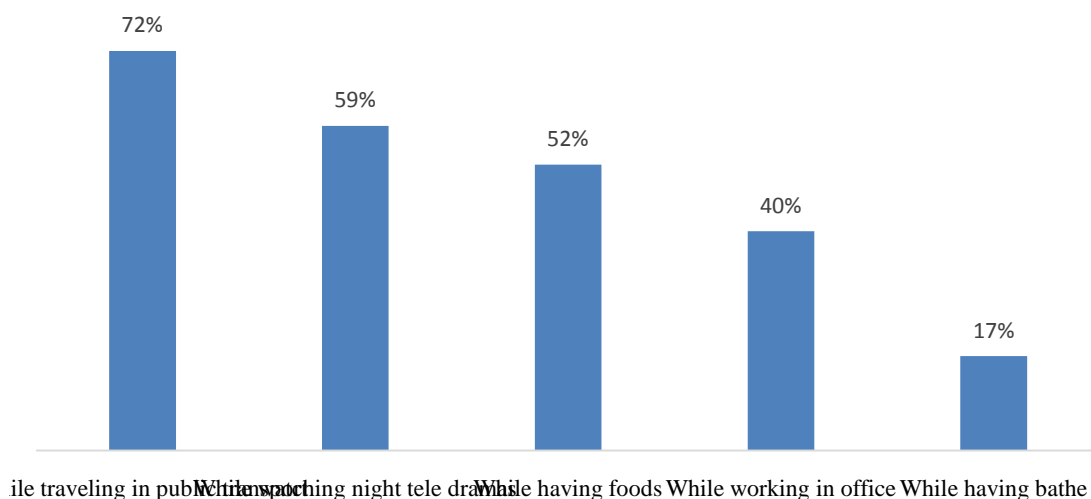
According to Table 2, out of the total sample, majority (72%) log in to online platforms while travelling in public transport followed by while watching night teledramas (59%) and while having food (52%).

Figure 7: Reasons for Accessing Digital Media Platforms
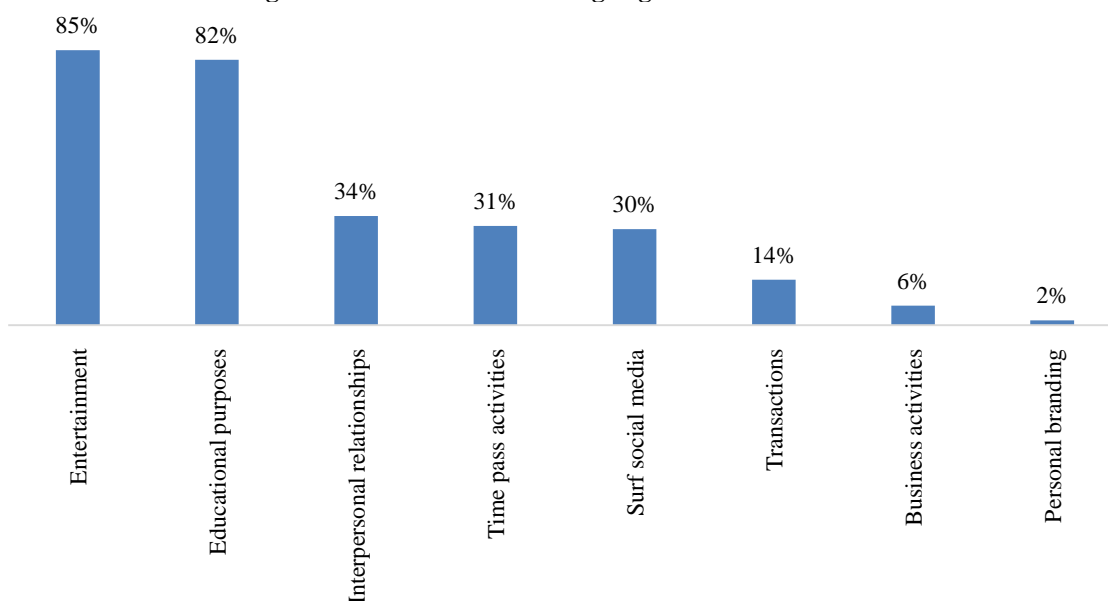
As per the Figure 6, more than 80% is using digital media platforms for entertainment and educational purposes. However, using digital media platforms for maintaining interpersonal relationships, passing time and surfing social media varies between 35% - 30%.

Routine	Count	%
Facebook	195	98%
YouTube	185	93%
LinkedIn	36	18%
Instagram	31	16%
Twitter	31	16%
Pinterest	2	1%
Sample Size	*200*	

Table 2: Digital Media Platforms Usage
Figure 8: Frequency of Accessing Digital Media

Daily   Weekly   Monthly   Once in 3 Months
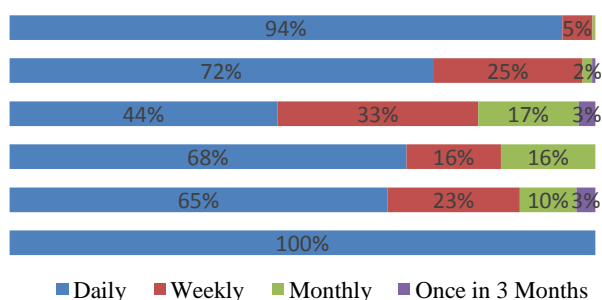
As per the Table 3, mostly accessed digital media platform is Facebook (98%), followed by YouTube (93%). However, social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter are accessed by 16% - 18% of the sample. Furthermore, as illustrated in Figure 7, 94% of the Facebook users access Facebook daily whereas less than three quarters of the YouTube users access YouTube daily. Even though Instagram and Twitter are accessed daily by more than two third of the users, LinkedIn is daily accessed by less than half of the users.

Figure 9: Language Used to Access Digital Media Platforms
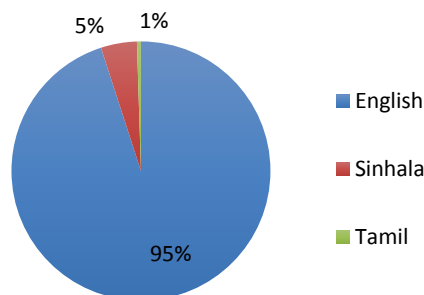

According to Figure 8 English, which accounts for 95%, is the most often used language when accessing social media platforms, whereas Sinhala and Tamil are used by 5% and 1% of the sample respectively.

**Figure 10: Time of Accessing Digital Media Platforms**
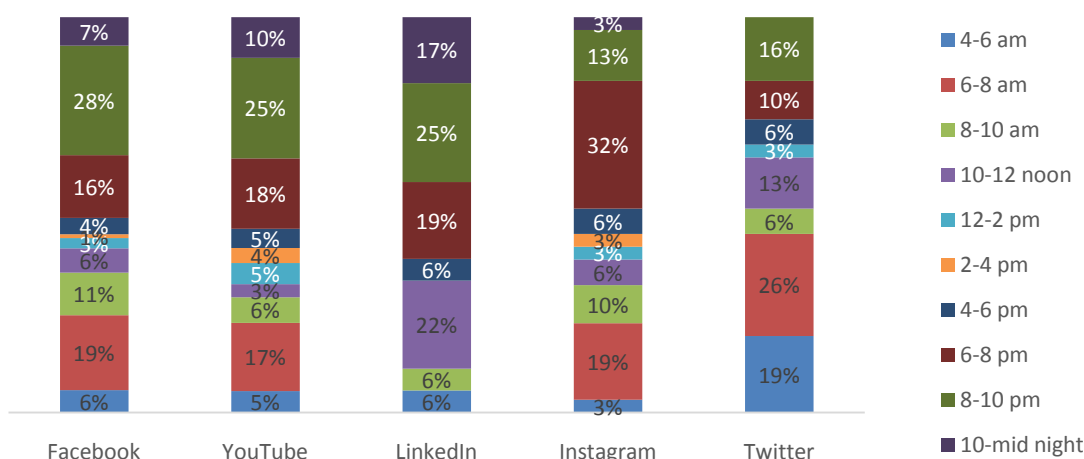
As per Figure 9 Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are mostly accessed in between 6-8 am and 6-10 pm. However, Twitter is accessed mostly in morning hours between 4-8 am whereas LinkedIn is accessed during 10-12 noon and 6-10 pm.

Figure 11: How Videos are Accessed
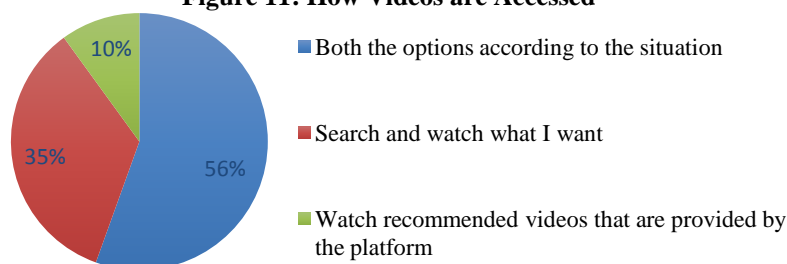
Considering Figure 10, it can be said that more than half of the sample watch videos either by searching what they want or watch recommended videos. However, 35% search by themselves and watch what they want while only 10% watch recommended videos provided by the platform.

Figure 12: Pages Followed in Facebook
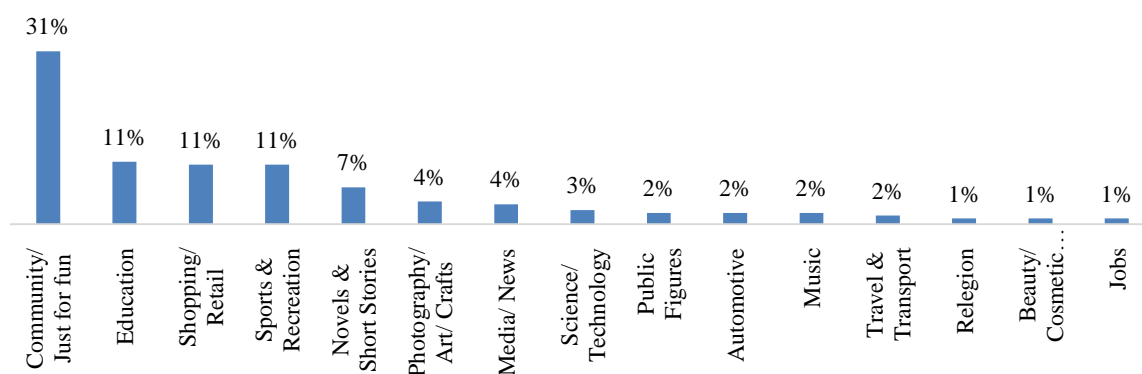
As illustrated in Figure 10, 31% of the Facebook users follow pages related to community/just for fun category, whereas 11% follows pages related to education, shopping/retail, sports and recreations.

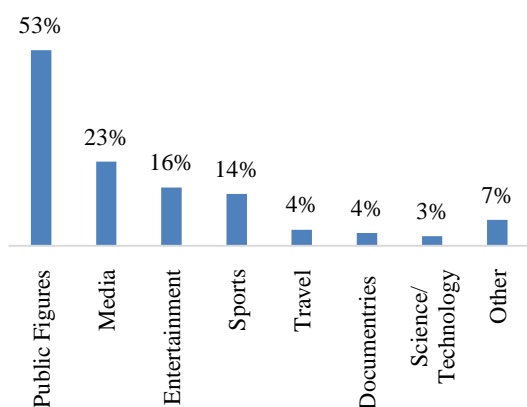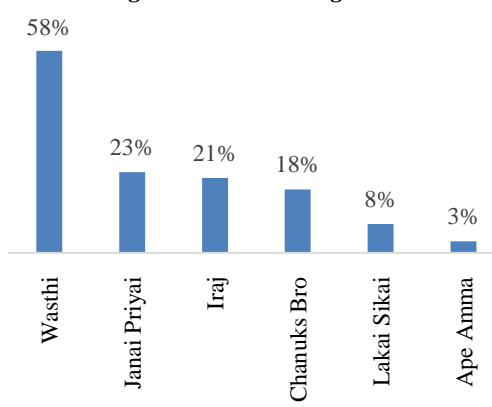**Figure 14: YouTube Channels Watched/ Subscribed**

Figure 13: Public Figures Followed in YouTube

As per Figure 11, the more than half of the YouTube users watch videos related to public figures and according to Figure 12, Wasthi videos (58%) are the most watched videos of the public figures followed by JanaiPriyai (23%) and Iraj (21%).

4.4 Perception and Behaviour towards Advertisements on Digital Media Platforms
Figure 15: Paid Advertisement on Online Platforms
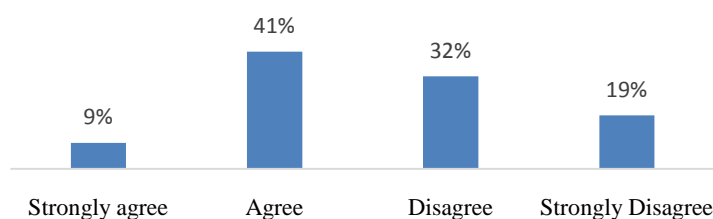
According to Figure 14, half of the young adults have claimed that they get paid advertisements when accessing digital media platforms, whereas the other half have claimed that they do not get paid advertisements.

Figure 16: Pre-Roll and Pop-up Advertisements
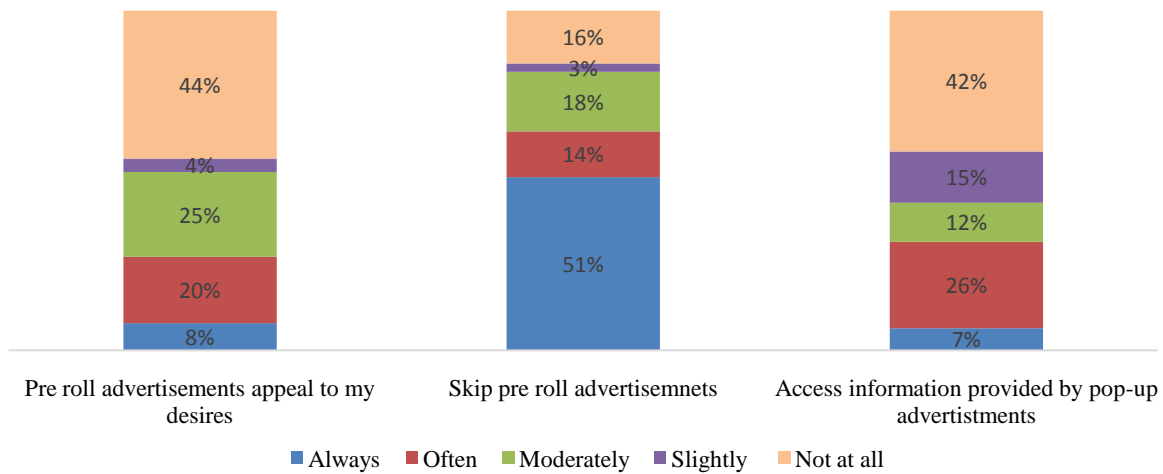
As demonstrated in Figure 15, nearly half of the sample have claimed that the pre roll advertisements that play when accessing YouTube and Facebook are not appealing to their desires. However, nearly 30% suggests that pre roll advertisements are appealing to them. Furthermore, 65% of the young adults in the sample always skip the pre roll advertisements on Facebook and YouTube while 17% carries a moderate view on that. About 19% of them slightly or do not skip the pre roll advertisements on Facebook and YouTube. In addition, one in every three access the information provided by pop-up advertisements while the rest do not access or view information provided by Pop up ads.

V.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
Digital technologies are associated with significant changes in the lives of young people and adults; there are many reasons to assume that there is a significant relationship between youth and digital media (Selwyn, 2009). As this preposition has been reasoned throughout this paper, there are few ways in which the current digital behaviour of youth can be said to change from previous generations. With these thoughts in mind, there is a clear need for all parties concerned with young people and technology to maintain a balanced and objective perspective on what can appear at first glance as a substantial transformation of social relations. We therefore hope that the critical lines of analysis pursued in this paper prompt information for professionals and educationalists to approach the digital behaviour literature with caution.

Findings of this study shed lights on marketers, content creators, software engineers, mobile network providers and those who have an interest regarding to digital media to identify the internet usage patterns and create and to improve blogs or web sites in a user-friendly manner. Moreover, effectively designed web content can be offered to the digital media consumers to increase the consumption. In addition, this has provided insights on the optimal time belt and digital media platforms that can be utilized in digital marketing when reaching the young adults.

Among the sample of internet users, 52% of respondents are female while 48% of respondents are male which indicated that there is no much difference between number of users in gender aspect. Although in previous literature mentioned that males use internet more, current statistics suggest that females use digital media than males in Sri Lankan context. Therefore, researcher can conclude marketing activities on digital media should consider posting content that are favourable to women than men, due to the fact that female are dominant on digital media platforms in Sri Lanka. Majority of the users (91%) use smartphones to log in to digital media platforms where content makers should pay their attention to create mobile friendly content to enable easy access. Since personal mobile data is the most common method of access internet, mobile data providers must provide data packages in favourable to young adults who pursue secondary or tertiary education, rather than paying attention on private Wi-Fi and internet modems. Among the sample, more than 80% is using digital media platforms for entertainment and educational purposes whereas content creators should be more creative to give their message while considering these reasons. It is evident that Facebook is the most preferred digital media platform among Sri Lankan young adults followed by YouTube and they access these digital media platforms in a daily basis more frequently.

Furthermore, 31% of the Facebook users follow pages related to community and just for fun category. Administrators who create Facebook pages should create their pages related to those categories. In addition,

when considering the behaviour towards YouTube channels, videos related to public figures are mostly watched or subscribed by young adults. Thus, it is a good opportunity for the marketers to market their products or services to youth through the public figures who are popular in YouTube. It is claimed that more than 50% of the sample get paid advertisements when they access digital media platforms. However, the findings of this paper depict that online advertisement creators should be more attentive and creative since almost 30% of the sample demanded that pre roll advertisements that play when accessing YouTube and Facebook are not appealing to the desires. Subsequently, 65% of the young adults in the sample always skip the pre roll advertisements on Facebook and YouTube.

This study was characterized with several limitations that restrict the reliability to generalize the findings. First, the study was restricted to the young population in Sri Lanka due to convenience of collecting data. Further sample was drawn from the students only. Therefore, it would be worth to examine the behaviour of consumers in other demographic categories to check whether results are stable. In line with the limitation of the study, further research can be designed to identify the digital behaviour with respect to demographic factors and some situational factors.

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