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A Sociological Analysis of News Reporting During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Review of the Sri Lankan Practices

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The Covid-19 pandemic can be seen as an unprecedented occurrence in the history of the humankind. Many incidents of everyday life changed with the spreading of the virus. Among these new changes, the ways in which news was reported regarding the spreading of the virus was criticized as being influential in creating a hyper-reality that was plagued by simulation. This phenomenon was visible in the Sri Lanka context as well, where news reporting was criticized due to its nature reporting, in which incidents were portrayed beyond their real facts that resulted in incidents of religious-discrimination, labeling of individuals, social-discrimination, promoting hate speech, social stigma and isolation of people. Therefore, this study, by using a thematic and discourse analysis, while making special reference to four selected incidents, endeavor to critically analyze how the news reporting helped to create what has been hailed as a hyper-reality which can be defined as an inability to consciously distinguish reality from a simulation of reality. This simulation can be defined as an imitation of the operation of a real-world process of information, when it comes to news reporting related to Covid-19. The findings reveal that, through news reporting, the institutions responsible for transmitting news and information among its audience have used the hype surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic to their own advantage by portraying a hyper-reality which is beyond the ascertainable knowledge of the audience who are made to believe in the constructs created through the news instead of the actual facts. It also showcases the power of news reporting in getting news and information across to the audience and how media can make use of simulation to capture the attention of the audience even with events that threatened the very existence of the human kind. Therefore, it is concluded that news reporting during the Covid-19 has taken people out of the core of the question to the periphery where the control of the reality is taken up by the institutions given the responsibility of reporting the news.

Key Words: Covid-19, Hyper-reality, Social Constructionism, Simulation, News Reporting

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