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The association between the use of selected forms of social media and emotional intelligence of undergraduates in a selected state University in Sri Lanka

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Background: Social Media (SM) permits self-presentation and social interactions which may affect the Emotional Intelligence (EI) of an individual. Hence, it is important to identify the impact of SM on EI as it leads to greater life satisfaction and better performance, both personally and professionally.

Objective: This study aimed to assess the association between the use of selected forms of SM and EI of undergraduates in a state University in Sri Lanka. Further, the study evaluated the time spent on SM, an individuals' EI, and selected correlates associated with time spent on SM and EI.

Methods & Materials: This cross-sectional study was conducted among 110 undergraduates of all four years of a Department of Information Technology. Ethical approval was obtained from Faculty of Medicine, Colombo, Sri Lanka. The modified social networking questionnaire, specially designed for this study, assessed the use of selected forms of SM (i.e. Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram). Wong and Law emotional intelligence scale assessed EI by the use of mean scores. It was cross-culturally adapted to Sri Lanka. Pearson Correlation was used to assess the association between use of SM and EI. $P < 0.05$ was considered significant.

Results: Mean age of study participants was 23.35 ± 1.317 years, and 69.1% were female. Participants reported a mean time of 3.3 hours on WhatsApp, 2.2 hours on Facebook and 1.1 hours on Instagram, per day, during weekdays. The distribution of the means of each subscale of EI ranged from 19.30 (± 6.220) to 20.86 (± 5.178). A negative correlation was observed ($r = -0.30$) between time spent on WhatsApp and EI. Age, gender and school type did not reflect any significant influence on time spent on SM. Age and year of study were significantly associated with EI, but not gender.

Conclusion: The time spent on SM has a negative impact on individual's level of EI.