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Abstract: Following the pandemic of COVID-19, many people as well as associations have changed their lifestyle and workspace habits. The pandemic created a new lifestyle for us which we have to live and abide by. It's also worth mentioning that the pandemic has highly affected the Lebanese Parliament and how it uses technology. In this paper, we will review the available media tools, the history of technology and the evolution of their use in the Lebanese Parliament.

Keywords: COVID-19; e-government; Lebanese Parliament; digital applications; remote work.

Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic affected many institutions and individuals, and changed a lot of the lifestyle, some for the worse and some for the better, but what is agreed upon is that huge impact that will accompany us for a long time after life gradually returns to normal. A new landscape of work and employment has emerged two months after the start of lockdown (Lambert, et al., 2020). Over 100 years ago, Science magazine published a paper on lessons learned from the Spanish Flu pandemic; the paper argued that three main factors stand in the way of prevention: (1) people do not appreciate the risks they run, (2) It goes against human nature for people to shut themselves up in rigid isolation as a means of protecting others, and (3) people often unconsciously act as a continuing danger to themselves and others (Van Bavel, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a massive global health crisis which requires large-scale behavior change and places significant psychological burdens on individuals. Insights from the social and behavioral sciences can be used to help align human behavior with the recommendations of epidemiologists and public health experts. But it seems different from another angle, as humanity today lives in the era of modern technology and digital applications where the e-newspaper, the e-government), and the e-book dominate. The explosion in the means of communication, the significant improvements in communications and information technology and the imposed global competition have led to a communication revolution in which organizations and institutions compete in terms of improving their functional performance technically (Ndou.V, 2004).

Digital solutions have become vital to address isolation and keep people informed and engaged (UN, 2020), and this lead us to investigate the extent to which the existing digital technologies are used in the Lebanese Parliament and the applications that the Lebanese Members of Parliament already use in their legislative work.

Objectives of the Study:

This study entails learning about the most important digital applications available in the Lebanese Parliament, to understand the basic concept of working during COVID-19, to analyze the factors effecting work of the MPs during COVID-19 and finally to examine the impact of COVID-19 on work performances of MPs. The study is characterized by being a quantitative study that enables describing and perceiving the characteristics inherent to the phenomenon of teleworking. This research paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature.

Hypotheses:

1. This study assumes that “In view of the emergence of the situation experienced because of the pandemic COVID-19, in a very short period of time, parliament employees and MPs were forced to change a huge set of routines”
2. COVID-19 pandemic has forced employees and MPs to learn new remote communication patterns.

Research Questions:

The research questions used for this study revolve around the experience of MPs and employees at the Lebanese Parliament and the changes in their work during COVID-19. This study asked about the impact of working from home on various elements and work expectations. In that, the aim is to answer the following questions:

1. How did the employees feel about their work experience during the pandemic?
2. What are the digital applications that they relied on during the quarantine period?
3. How much did working from home affect their duties?
4. What changes are they hoping for and/or expecting after the pandemic?

Literature Review:

COVID-19 has become a huge worry for the Globe and its social and economic impact will be far reaching and devastating for all in this globally connected world. COVID-19 is likely to lead to certain permanent or long-lasting impacts and by the time it ends, we will probably see a new world, and new lexicon of lifestyle (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020).

In a recent survey, the majority of respondents found that overall conventional work elements either remained the same or had been impacted positively rather than negatively. Also, if given

an option of a hybrid model inclusive of partly working, remotely and partly working on-site, a considerable majority reported that they are able to efficiently conduct at least 80% of their work expectation. Finally, it was found that employee expectation is changing as they consider post COVID-19 conditions (Diab-Bahman, 2020). Initial research interest in teleworking, or the notion of working remotely, was fueled during the 1970s, when the expression “working from home” was used to connotative the term distant working from the workplace, fundamentally by methods of technological communications, as a substitute for physical traveling (Nilles, 1976).

Another study shows that adapting to teleworking was easy or very easy and that it happened very quickly. The main difficulties encountered by the individuals were the lack of professional interaction/communication with coworkers, the lack of resources related to support infrastructures, such as the internet or a printer, and the reconciliation of teleworking with family life/household chores/dedication to children and time/schedule management (Tavares, 2020). On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) qualified the public health emergency caused by the disease COVID-19 as an international pandemic, constituting a public calamity (WHO, 2020). The vast majority of countries in the world decided to adopt quarantine as a containment measure caused by the virus.

There is a positive association between productivity and teleworking. This can happen because workers can work longer hours (not wasting time traveling) and choose to use that extra time to work with less involvement in organizational policy. In jobs that require high focus, better performance is obtained at home/teleworking. Teleworking can provide employees with the flexibility to better manage their private lives and become more productive (Beauregard, 2019). Rocha (2018) discusses the importance of concentration and time management of teleworking during working hours. The most optimistic readings endeavor to emphasize the positive aspects,

but, it is far from being taken as unequivocally advantageous and entails some risks for both the worker and for the society. In terms of risks, the form of sociability of workers stands out (Rocha, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted great number of people to work remotely. Working from Home (WFH) is a concept which is now going to be a permanent feature in the corporate world. The current pandemic situation has demonstrated that WFH is an effective business process to ensure continuity of business and also to provide work life balance to employees. It has significant economic and productivity benefit for organizations if managed effectively (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020).

ICT in Lebanese Parliament:

Digital means of communication are mostly used in the Lebanese Parliament according to internal and external patterns, and it has become necessary for the Lebanese Parliament to deal with modern technology using various tools, as a modern media system based on two basic elements: information and communication. Any talk about the media in our time cannot be outside the characteristics and elements of modern media and the institutions of the information society, and this prompts us to search for the electronic identity of the legislative institution in Lebanon (Basheir, 2003).

In this regard, information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support governance strategies remain an important driving force for realizing this transition, particularly in the context of international market pressures and global competition. It presents incredible opportunities to innovate, strengthen and improve the ways of working and creates plenty of advantages (WDR, 2016). In order to seek the economic, social and environmental sustainability,

it is necessary to establish both good governance and e-government strategies by identifying the mechanisms, processes and outcomes (Dhaoui, 2020).

The Lebanese Parliament has kept pace with the modern digital revolution since 1992. Before this period, the parliamentary media had no more than two “phone lines”. Today, the digital revolution has left its mark on the parliamentary media, so that this media is no longer based on vertical activation (inside the parliament), but has expanded to use horizontal activation lines (the parliament’s interaction with the people). The Lebanese Parliament has a number of technical means required for the media to carry out their work, starting with the press room equipped with all means of communication, passing through the parliament’s media office to which representatives and media professionals refer when needed, as well as the presence of permanent representatives inside the parliament for all visual, written, audio and electronic media, up to the Informatics Department, which is considered one of the main and important sources of information.

The majority of parliaments in the world are working to develop modern technical systems that facilitate the work of the parliament and pursue technology in its various forms. In Lebanon, the parliament has had a modern electronic system since 1992, which provides different services to parliamentarians and parliament employees in different departments, whether internally (intranet) or externally (internet). BTS, the electronic library, the electronic voting system, the council’s website, the deputy’s email, and the Informatics Department in the council, in addition to (Mobile Application), and additional technologies that facilitate the work of employees in the council are all available and in use.

In 2001, a database was launched to collect all the law proposals submitted by the deputies and the draft laws submitted by the Council of Ministers, where data is technically classified after

digitization; this is known as the Bill Tracking System (BTS) (Moawad, 2020). This system was updated in 2017, through the EU-funded project “Support to Parliamentary Development in Lebanon” and in 2019 by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) (Dhaini, 2020).

The INMOBILES application was created in 2017 with funding from the EU-funded project “Support to Parliamentary Development in Lebanon” based on a pre-established terms sheet with the Informatics Department in the Parliament (Dhaini, 2020). It is a program for deputies, and it can be downloaded to any smart phone. This program provides the deputies through notifications with different information (Kais, 2020). One of the very important features of this program is the deputy's ability to access the BTS program via a special link found in the application.

Since 2005, the Lebanese Parliament has had a very modern electronic voting system from a technical point of view, and the devices for this system have been installed and are operational since that time in the Parliament's plenary (Hajjar, 2006). The work of this system has not been activated as a result of several obstacles, the most important of which is that the Lebanese Constitution stipulates in Article No (36) that “opinions are given by oral vote or by standing and sitting, except in the case in which the election is intended, so votes are given by secret ballot” (Constitution, 2018).

The Documents Center was established in the Lebanese Parliament in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program, which provides the Parliament Library with a set of international agreements issued by the United Nations (Tarheni, 2020). Its main objective is to secure international references from UN documents and to involve international organizations operating in Lebanon by providing the Center with bulletins and reports for the MPs and parliament staff to benefit from in all matters relating to democracy, human rights and the environment (Basheir, 2003).

In the past, the meetings of the assembled parliamentary committees were recorded via a cassette, and then transcribed onto paper by a special employee who received the cassette from the secretary, to be signed by the head of the committee after it was unpacked. In 2018, this system was updated, and all meetings became available in an electronic copy in the format (MP4 - MP3), which is kept on the main server of the Council, and then it is unpacked for archiving. The Information Department of the Parliament, in cooperation with the library, has developed a joint project to link the library's database with the parliament's website, so that visitors to the site can view all the publications and titles of existing books.

The Lebanese Parliament is one of the first legislative institutions in the Arab world that established a modern website that simulates technology, and presents details, documents in different languages (Maaloli, 2020), (Mirza, 2020). The website was established in 1997, funded by USAID, and the implementation of the project was monitored by the American University of New York Albany, through the office of a representative of the university in Beirut. The State University of New York also contributed to the implementation of the project (Dhaini, 2020).

The Parliament's website contains information about the Parliament, its history and successive presidents. It also provides electronic texts of some legislation and laws for those interested in viewing them. The site also contains the activities of the Speaker of Parliament, workshops and various parliamentary activities, as well as complete and detailed information about the Parliament's internal system and some important documents Such as the Taif Agreement, the electoral laws and the Lebanese constitution (Maaloli, 2020).

The site also offers the Parliament Training Program in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program project in the Parliament. This program targets MPs, the General Secretariat, some general directorates, parliamentary committees outside committee sessions, and

university graduates from students of media, political science, administrative sciences, law and relations International, which is a two-month training program, in which the participant studies about thirty content related to the work of the Parliament in general and obtains a certificate of participation at the end of the course. This program aims to link the academic university graduates' knowledge with practical work in order to expand their learning and gain valuable experience in the public policy-making process. The program also gives trainees the opportunity to work with their elected MPs and develop their relationships with the public sector.

MPs and the Technology:

The Member of Parliament has all the modern technical means that enable him to keep track of technological development by different means, starting from e-mail to technically following laws, passing through a series of internal communication networks in the Parliament (Dhaini, 2020). Every MP in the Parliament has a private computer in his or her office with internet to communicate with all parliament departments through an internal network.

Data Collection:

Primary data is based on the current data collected from the interviews and questions asked to the Human Resources Manager, some decision makers in Parliament, working professionals and from the empirical analysis survey completed by the employees and MPs. The secondary data is collected from various research papers, articles and studies related to this research.

According to this study, the samples are the MPs (38/128) and the employees (62/119) in the Lebanese Parliament; a total of (100/247). The collected data was coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Survey Design and Findings:

The self-administered online questionnaire consisted of eight questions consisting of four types: short answer questions, (Yes/No) questions, checkbox questions and multiple choice questions.

The survey questions were written in English and Arabic to increase the number of participants.

According to the yearly report prepared on the work of the General Directorate for Parliamentary Sessions and Committees Affairs, the number of parliamentary sessions reached about 249 in 2018. However, the work of the parliamentary committees during 2019 reached 276 sessions, compared to 182 sessions in 2018. That is, an increase of 34%, while the subcommittees also held about 43 sessions, with the year 2018 recording about 40 sessions. The total number of sessions of the specialized committees and joint sub-committees, workshops, seminars, and meetings reached 432 (Ghannam, 2020).

On the other hand, the work of the parliamentary committees during the year 2020 recorded a decline compared to the year 2019, as the number of parliamentary committees' sessions during the year 2020 amounted to about 174 sessions, compared to 276 sessions in 2019, a decrease of 34%, while the sub-committees also recorded a slight progress, as they held about 53 sessions, while The year 2019 recorded about 43 sessions (Ghannam, 2020).

Based on the survey analysis, the highest age group of employees in the Lebanese Parliament is the 50-60 years (Q1) and the percentage of male employees more than females (Q2) as shown in figure 1.

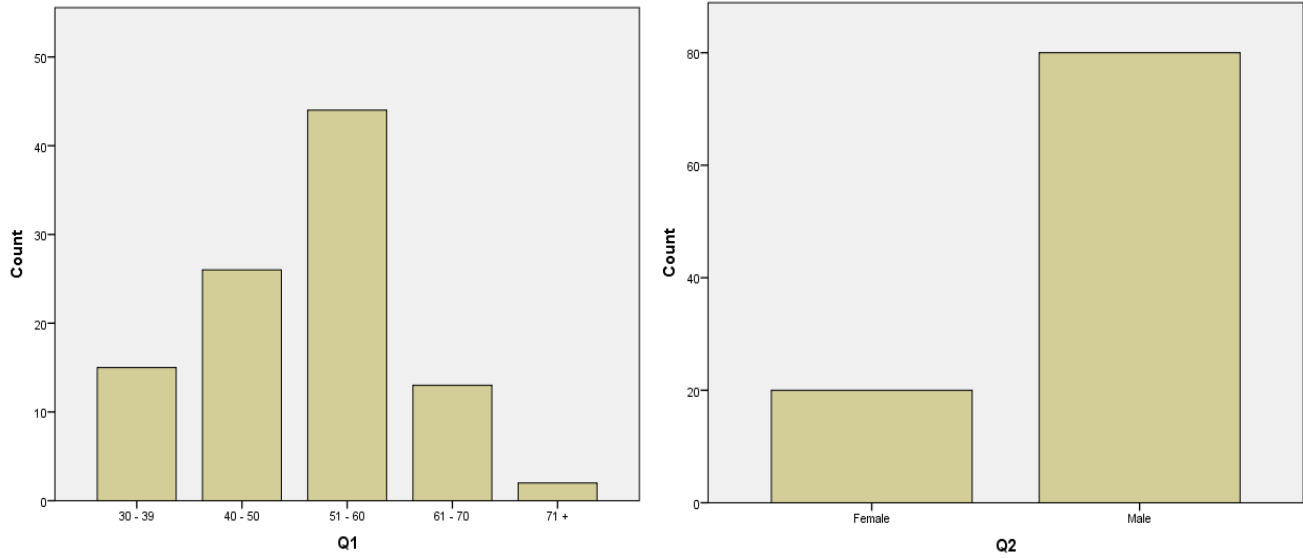


Figure 1: Age and gender percentages

41% of the respondents say that they were affected by COVID-19 in their work as shown in figure 2(a) which means that this pandemic has had some impact on changing the form and pattern of work in the parliament. However, 31% of the respondents considered that this pandemic affected their working hours in the Parliament, as shown in Figure 2(b).

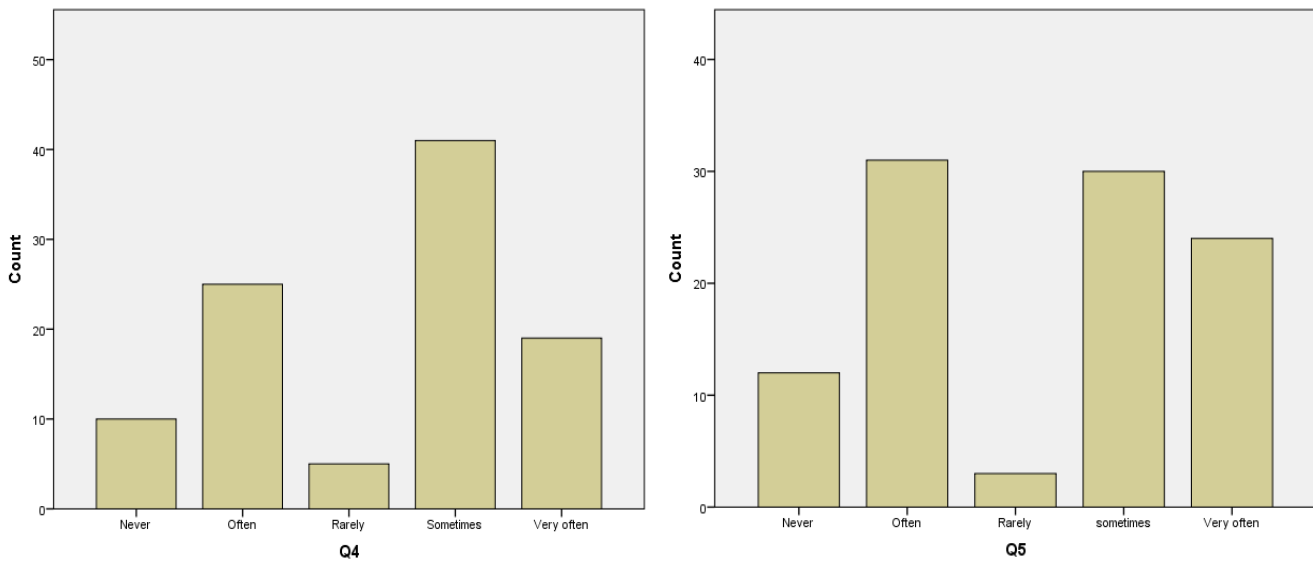


Figure 2: Work impact

It seems that the Parliament took strict measures in terms of attendance during the quarantine period at the height of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, as 32% (figure 3) of the employees used to go to the Parliament three days, and the meetings of the MPs were held in the UNESCO building due to the large area, which allows a good spacing between them, since the parliament building was damaged by the harbor explosion in August 2020.

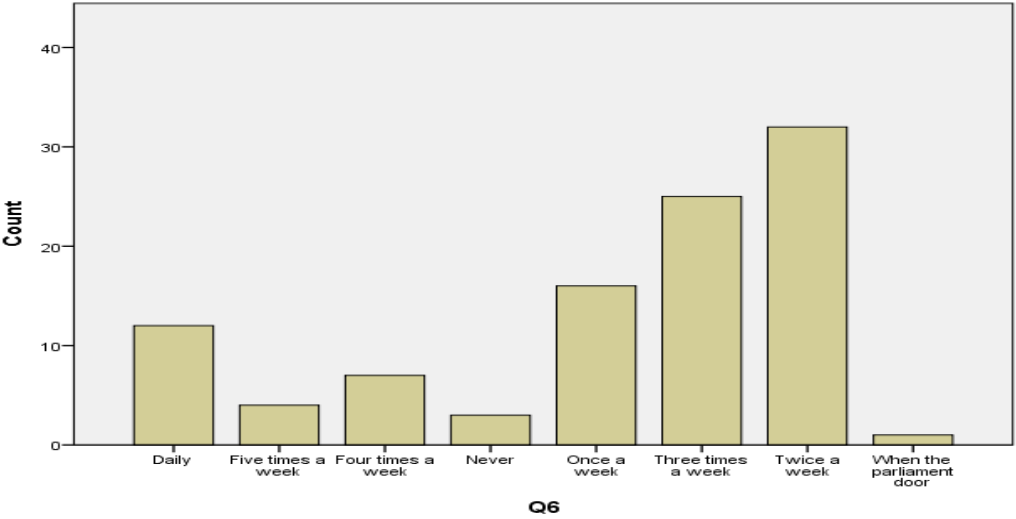


Figure 3: Physical presence in parliament

The results of the study showed that 31% of the employees did not work remotely and 43% of them considered that Parliament is not ready to work remotely technically despite the availability of modern digital capabilities and applications as shown in figure 4 (Q7 – Q8).

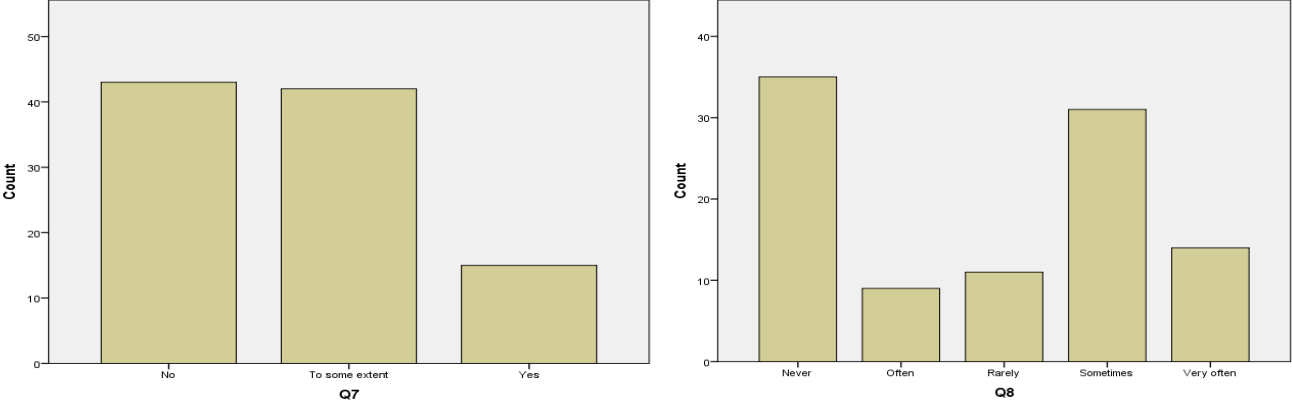


Figure 4: Remote work

Despite the availability of many digital applications and communication tools for the employees and the MPs, 61% of the sample relied on What's App to conduct their work, while 43% preferred to communicate via phone, 37% via email, and 27% via the Zoom application, however, few of them used mobile app or Parliament website as shown in the graphs of figures 5 and 6 respectively (Q9 – Q10).

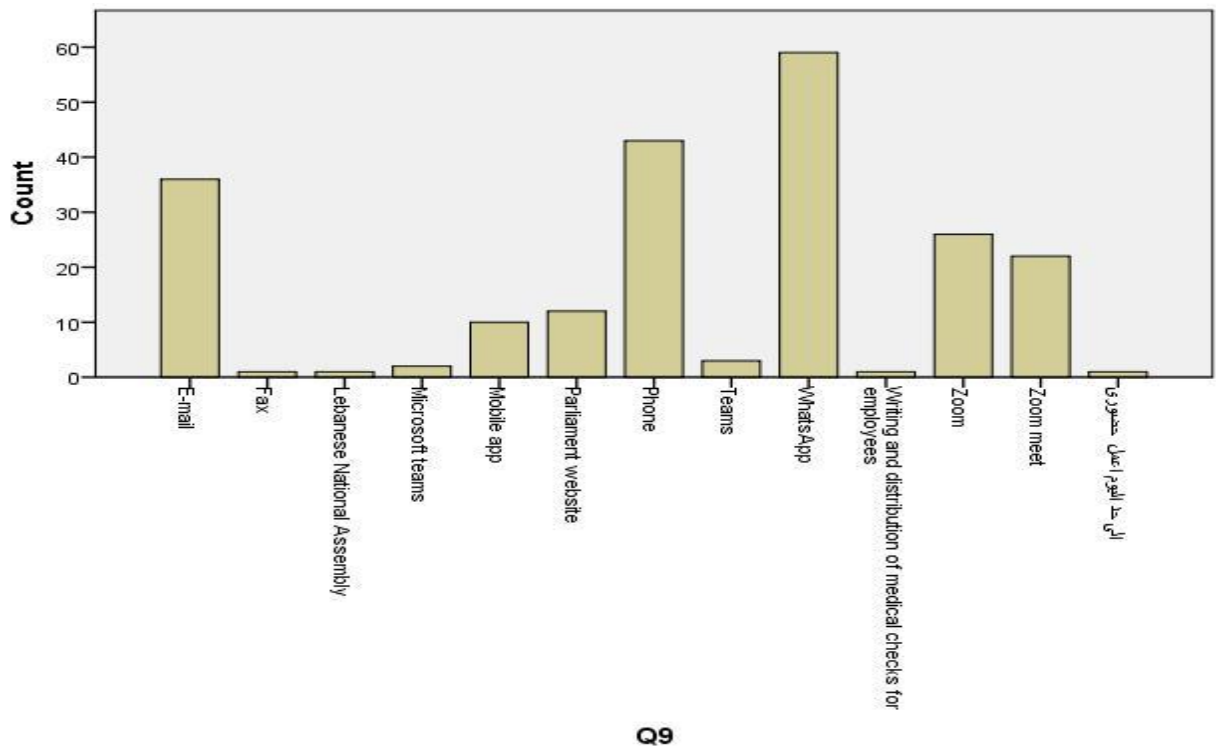


Figure 5: Public applications use

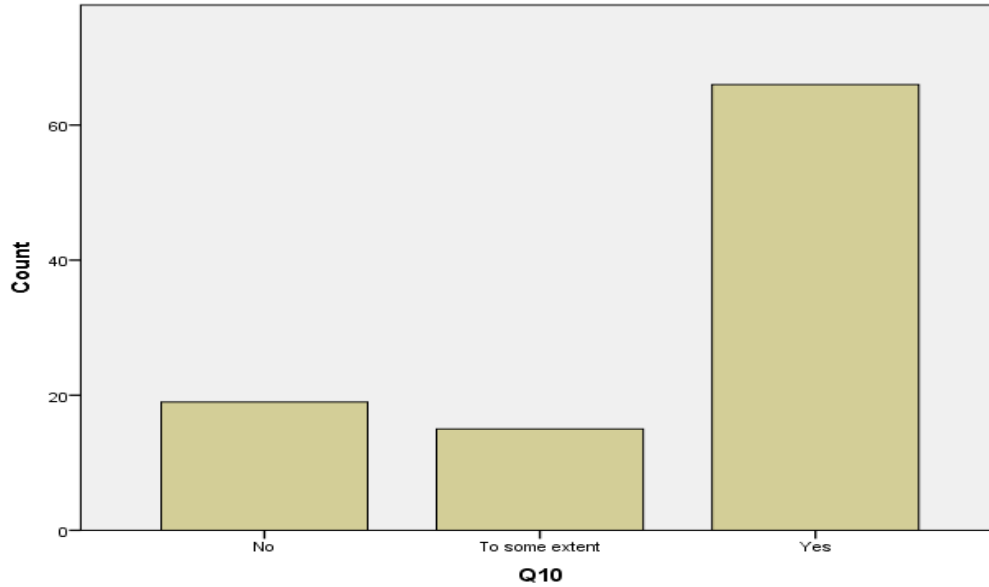


Figure 6: LP applications use

Conclusion:

It seems clear that the COVID-19 pandemic did not affect the Parliament’s work as a functional job, but as the employees continued to attend, even if intermittently, by attending from 2 to 3 days a week, and the parliament’s sessions or meetings continued when necessary. What is clear is the change in work time and in the communication ways as 47% of employees started using technology more during the quarantine period.

Most of the applications that were used by the parliament’s employees are public and available to anyone, therefore, the percentage of employees using what’s App application has reached 61%, and then the use of phones reached 43%. 10% of the employees relied to use applications of the Parliament such as Mobile Application, as well as, 37% used the Parliament’s email were not taken advantage of, however, 66% of employees had to use technology to communicate, as the Corona pandemic forced, 44% of them learned to use these applications.

Despite this, the experience of working remotely didn't please most of the employees, 54% of whom preferred to work physically at the Parliament.

This research has a limitation represented in the fact that there is an inability to generalize the results to other countries due to the heterogeneity of the sample in terms of number compared to the parliaments of other countries, and the lack of a solid technical infrastructure in Lebanon compared to other countries.

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