Overview on the Role of Online Media in Education during COVID-19 Pandemic

Debabrata Biswas, Dr. Mugdha Sengupta

Research Scholar, Dept. of Mass Communication, Burdwan University & Assistant Professor, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication, Mrinalini Datta Mahavidyapith, Kolkata-700051

Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Burdwan University

Abstract: Due to COVID-19 pandemic several universities and schools have been forced to close immediately and have switched to remote delivery of all academic activities as a result of the lockdowns imposed in most countries (Sangster, Stoner, and Flood, 2020). It is an obvious fact that during the Corona pandemic, online media played a significant role in higher education. In the absence of traditional classroom study, the whole educational system is conducted only through online media supported communication which leads to a new learning environment in our society and culture. Although, it has been witnessed that to establish the contacts between the teachers and students and to schedule contact classes through technology where spatial distance has been virtually abolished through digital imaging and communication. This situation necessitates observing the new role played by the online media in education during this crisis time.

Keywords: Online Media, Education, Pandemic, Communication, Overview

Introduction:
COVID-19 affects almost all aspects of life such as the health system, economy, education and more. According to the data of UNESCO almost 1.2 billion children have been affected by this Corona pandemic. More than 190 countries and 94% of the world’s students have also been affected (UNESCO, 2020). There have been many consequences of COVID-19 for a number of areas of life, including the health care, economy, and also education (Shang, Li, and Zhang, 2021). Covid-19 has affected students in over 190 countries, affecting 94% of the world's students (UNESCO, 2020). Students of universities, colleges to schools all have been suffering and institutions have been temporarily closed due to the limit of spread of the disease of Coronavirus (Xiang et al, 2020). Due to maintaining social distance, people were more prone to use of social media. As per report use of social media have increased about 61% in the first three months of COVID-19 outbreak. Continuous use of social and online media students are more likely to search online classes for their study. Further, it breaks the walls of the university and removes constraints in education as a whole (Ally & Prieto-Blazquez, 2016; Bansal & Dhananjay, 2014). Mobile phones and new information and communication based technologies not only transferred the education system but also the entire society as well (Concannon, Esmall, and Roberts, 2019; Gómez-Ramírez, Valencia-Arias, and Duque, 2019). Although there is no such detailed description about the transition from offline classroom teaching to online mode or even the mixed method i.e. hybrid model of communication. So it is important to understand how online media supported communication can be benefitted for students as well as academicians.

Research Objectives and Methods:
Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India typically award degrees to their students after completing their courses in accordance with traditional methods of teaching and learning. Although, some institutes have also started a blended method of teaching in the last few years. Some open e-learning courses, MOOCs course materials also uploaded on different online platforms. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced college and university students to take online classes not only as an option, but as a necessity in order to get through their studies. Meanwhile many students of higher education institutes have completed their three or more Semesters/Degrees through online Teaching modes (via - Email, WhatsApp, Video conferencing sites etc.). Hence, as a student of media and communication, the role of online media needs to be studied minutely to observe the relationship between different variables and also other aspects of online education during pre-pandemic and pandemic years. Thus, this study aims to review online media's role in education during Corona pandemic. With this goal of study this paper is based on review of recent research articles.

Discussion:
In a study conducted by Gocotano and others (2021), the sudden emergence of COVID-19 has resulted in 28 million Filipino students being affected. This paper concentrated on the higher education students and collected data on different online learning environments and an analysis of the positive and negative aspects of the new online learning modes introduced at a rural university campus in Cebu province in the Philippines. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were followed to analyse the 639 participants of the single satellite campus. To know the challenges in implementing the online teaching in rural areas, researchers collected and analysed data on parents’ educational background, family income, technological availability, insufficient devices for online learning, digital literacy level, mode of internet access, difficulties of study material collection and distractive learning environment etc. and suggested: (i) Technology training for both teachers and students, (ii) Adequate infrastructure to internet facilities in university campuses, (iii) Development of internet connections in rural areas where the students are living and (iv) Address the problem of low-income families of the students and also try to find other non-digital learning modes teaching to ensure productive
learning. Only one province and single rural university students are chosen for a sample of the study which is the limitations of research.

At a South African university, Mpungose (2020) conducted a two-year postdoctoral qualitative study to understand students' transition from class room learning to e-learning. An inductive and a deductive reasoning process was used to analyse the data. Through a case study approach, the study concluded that students experience hindrances in realising the desirable overcome of e-learning. The study found that a blended learning information centre, free data bandwidth and free online resources are effective solutions of e-learning.

In their article, EI-Badawy and Hashem (2015) used a survey method to survey 120 students between the ages of 12 and 19 in Egypt. To determine how social media affects students' academic performance, questionnaires were distributed via Facebook and e-mail. The study found that Egyptian students spent between one and six hours per day on different platforms of social media, like Google and Facebook, mainly for studying. The findings of the study by using chi-square analysis, suggest that students' overall academic performance is not related to their use of social media.

In India, a handful studies have been published so far on the effect of online learning of college going students. As part of his thesis, Gupta (2018) attempted to compare the experiences of learners and teachers in face-to-face and online education in management subjects. Another thesis done by Rajasankar (2018) on e-learning system in educational institutes at college level in Tuticorin district concluded to develop systems for e-learning in educational institutions and newline should consider improving e-learning practices that motivate greater engagement with different learning style for considering students. Educational institutions are progressing with new teaching methods, approaches for their students in facilitating the environment, newline infrastructure, and employment opportunities.

Muthuprasad and others (2021) reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, 70% of respondents plan to opt for online classes to manage their curriculums. For online learning, smartphones were preferred by the majority of students. Online classes are appealing to students because of their convenience and flexibility, but in rural areas, they are difficult to attend due to the lack of broadband connections. Although it may not be possible to shift completely to an online model in agricultural education due to its practical nature in most courses.

Kapasias and others (2020) focusing on E-learning status of undergraduates and postgraduates students of West Bengal Colleges and Universities during lockdown of Covid-19 pandemic mostly concentrated upon Malda (42.2%) and Darjeeling (32.8%) districts. The data collection has been done by online survey, which was conducted by Google form through WhatsApp and e-mail. Sample size of the study was 232. The paper included segments of data collection and analysis, learner's characteristics, their knowledge and attitudes towards Covid-19 along with learning status and academic environment, detail information about online classes, material sharing, evaluation procedure, following UGC recommendations during lockdown period, students and their families Economic condition and other associated problem related to their study. Descriptive statistics, simple percentage distribution and SPSS tools of data analysis were used. The limitation or research gap in the research manuscript was that it focused mainly in the higher education institutes of rural areas. It can be elevated to urban institutes also. The data set was small and it can be escalated. A targeted intervention for promoting study environments among vulnerable students was suggested in the study. New strategies are required to establish an excellence education system to develop skills for employability and the productivity of students.

Another study (Mishra, Gupta and Shree 2020) focuses on how students and teachers perceive online learning and teaching modes - both quantitatively and qualitatively. This paper provides an overview of online teaching-learning processes during the lockdown period, focusing on how COVID-19 has impacted on the newly introduced online systems, so that the persisting academic disturbance may be overcome and educational activities and discourses can resume as part of the normal course of education.

Jena (2020) in his article, collected data from journals and e-resources and analysed them to study the merits and demerits of online learning platforms or other online mediated communication apps during lockdown period and proposed effective methods for learners. The findings from the study emphasize on the initiatives taken by the various agencies of the Government of India such as MHRD, UGC and the open universities in the pandemic period and suggest in favour of more digital divide supports and safety measures and necessary training for all the stakeholders for online education platforms.

Dhawan (2020) in her article, analysed secondary sources of data like journal and reports, company websites and scholarly articles, research papers to understand the challenges to shift online teaching-learning from traditional pedagogical approaches. This article also suggests a high level of preparedness on different delivery modes of online media supported learning on ICT infrastructure, learning tools, e-content, e-notes etc. The study also emphasises on the utmost importance of the educators in a pandemic situation and the author suggests for a system to be developed by the higher learning institutes (Universities, Colleges) to make sure that no student is deprived in education irrespective of their geographical location, social class, ethnicity etc.

In a survey-based empirical study (Chakraborty et al. 2020), 358 under-graduate and graduate students from sophisticated urban technological, design and management universities of three campuses were asked to give their opinion in various ways of online education during the ongoing pandemic. Almost 66% of students opined that they learnt better in physical classroom while 40% students preferred attending MOOCs by online education. More than 68% students opined that the online teaching skills of teachers have improved during the pandemic. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic break, almost 78% of students thought online education would be beneficial. The researchers examine the influence of various aspects of online education such as general issues, content delivery, interaction, assessment and health issues through different steps, structural model, factor loadings and average variance extraction (AVE) to test consistency and ensure validity of the variables. Through different steps, researchers examine the effects of things like general issues, content delivery, interactions, assessment, and health issues in online education. They test consistency and validity of the variables with a structural model, factor loading, and average variance extraction (AVE).
Conclusion:

There is no doubt that online media have played a significant role in education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the lack of traditional classroom study, the whole educational system is conducted only through online media supported communication which leads to a new learning environment in our society and culture. Although, it has been witnessed that to establish the contacts between the teachers and students and to schedule contact classes through technology where spatial distance has been virtually abolished through digital imaging and new communication methods.

During this pandemic, in between 2020-22, online education and distance education, which are two separate modes of teaching-learning, will converge into a single format. It is interesting finding that during the pandemic traditional classroom education and online teaching have not separated rather merged with the digital format. It is also to be mentioned here that online media is the only vehicle to smooth running of the education system, especially higher education system in West Bengal and it is also the factor for not wasting the academic year of millions of students and it leads a new cultural environment in academics during this pandemic.

References: