

CONSUMER INTENTION TOWARDS BLENDED LEARNING A MEDIATING ROLE OF ATTITUDE

Anuj Verma, Symbiosis International University
Meenakshi Verma, Symbiosis International University
Gangu Naidu, Christ University

ABSTRACT

Purpose: *The outbreak of the Corona Pandemic has compelled Indian Universities and other Educational Institutions to resort to Digital mediums for teaching. This research paper attempts to measure the customer response on a combination of Digital and Physical teaching practices that shall prove beneficial and effective to the students and teachers of Management Schools.*

Design/ Methodology/Approach: *This research paper tries to throw light on the consumer perception pertaining to the blended teaching practices during covid pandemic. This data of 434 respondents have been gathered through online survey. A detailed questionnaire was floated and data was analysed using SPSS and model was tested using SEM*

Findings: *The paper reveals that infrastructure and attitude of teachers, teaching and learning practices played a significant role in shaping the consumer opinion about blended learning. The findings also revealed that role of parents are also very crucial in shaping the student's attitude towards blended learning. Language barriers did not have a significant effect on the opinion about blended learning. The mediating role of attitude towards consumer intention has been established*

Practical implications: *The authors have tried to provide distinctive teaching ingenuities to contest the problems posed by the Corona crisis. These ideologies laid down by the authors can influence the teaching fraternity and student populaces at Management Colleges and Universities in India to a very great extent.*

Keywords: Corona Pandemic, Digital Medium, Consumer Intention, Attitude, Teaching Initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

The Novel Corona Virus has caused a lot of hue and cry across the cross-section of society. The entire world is affected by its curse on account of its pervasive contagion, high death rate, and deferral in devising a vaccine. As per the report given by UNESCO in 815 countries, educational institutions were unable to operate which affected 1 542 412 000 learners. Some countries though started easing the restrictions but still, educational institutions were not functional in 177 countries which affected 1 268 164 088 learners (Marinoni et al., 2020). This has made the Indian Government resort to certain measures. Complete care is taken to ensure the Government guidelines of Physical and social distancing (Benard, 2004). These actions are largely focused to disrupt the shackle of the contamination and ensure fewer encumbrances on the civic-health apparatus of India.

The paper tries to explore the hindrances that stand in the way of feasibility, capacity building and delivery of inclusive online instruction for students, administrators, curriculum and technology directors, teachers, parents, and students. Covid-19 has triggered a metamorphic change in the education system which had led to innovation in learning and knowledge delivery some of these trends which may improvise the ways of teaching-learning of higher education in India are outlined (Jena, 2020).

The medical amenities in India have a very significant role to play, in terms of offering timely and effective services to all in need. The students are now being forsaken from enjoying their hostel life, campus enjoyment and have been forced to stay home and make use of online teaching only. Some researchers opine that students undertaking an online mode of teaching have become more amenable in comparison to the student who has undertaken one to one mode of learning. The study also revealed that online classes were found to be as effective as face-to-face classes by only 35.2% of learners. The digital skills required to make the online classes effective were found lacking in both teachers and the students (Priyadarshini & Bhaumik, 2020; Sahu, 2020) believed that to support the mental health and wellbeing of the students proper counselling services should be available, but few other researchers have agreed to the blended mode of teaching as the best and most effective way of teaching. Despite innumerable research, the education system still remains unsure of the victory of the use of the digital medium for teaching. The constituents of the education industry must approve and adapt to this changing scenario from offline to online mode keeping in mind that enormous capital is involved. This has impacted the admissions numbers across all institutes. Policymakers and think-tankers are finding it very challenging while drafting educational policies. Since the transition of teaching is happening from online to offline the all the stakeholders (students, teachers, parents) are facing the heat in the process (Tarkar, 2020). Parents being the prime motivator in this learning process are not fine-tuned for this online learning and while quite a few parents prefer homeschooling, this seems unlikely to generalize over the whole population (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). The prospects of educational establishments remain inconsistent as the government is not able to reach any definite decision. Further, to all these qualms, university funds are affected because of the unsteady stock market conditions, abridged or no allowances from government bodies.

As per the report generated by wheebox on skill India the employability level of students who graduated from colleges was found to be 46% in 2020 while the Figure 1 was 34% in the year 2014 Although there is an increase in the number of employable students in India, it is likely to be impacted as real-time learning has stopped randomly due to Covid-19 scare. Numerous educational institutions may be adversely affected and ultimately close down due to a cash crunch. Higher education is the most affected sector including the B Schools which are also facing the wrath of this pandemic. The service sector remains largely affected by the outburst of COVID 19. Students who were keen to try their luck in service sectors are now.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Outbreak of Covid-19 Pandemic

In December 2019, China was in the worldwide spotlight when a peculiar outbreak of pneumonia struck Wuhan of Hubei province (Bates, 2000). Chinese health officials deployed immediate measures to contain the disease, which included isolation of patients, collecting their epidemiological and clinical data to develop diagnostic and treatment procedures (Wang et al., 2020).

In a report by the WHO, On 12 June 2020, the number of COVID-19 cases stood at a staggering 7.5 million with more than 421,000 fatalities. So far, no exact medication is accepted to heal Covid-19, thus immediately requiring the development of an antiviral drug (Peng, 2020). Highly contagious diseases significantly impact the survival of humankind. Apart from the physical challenges, they spawn more psychosocial problems amongst the masses in contrast to pre-existing diseases. It is because the majority of people lack adequate knowledge of newfound diseases (Ko et al., 2006).

Covid has punctured the global economy. Countries across the globe are in the fight to curb the transmission of covid by taking steps such as admitting & treating people in quarantine centers, limiting large gatherings & implementing a series of lockdowns (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020).

Up to 32 crore students have stopped going to their institutes, and all educational related activities are on hold in India. Change is inevitable, this message has been clearly delivered throughout this pandemic (Brown & Sammut, 2012) on the bright side, the outbreak has opened up doors for the educational bodies to grow & adapt to technological platforms, which usually were not the norm.

The impact of Covid-19 has been felt globally in all areas of human concern ranging from religious activities social gathering, education, tourism, research, logistics economy, employment, business, and politics. The pandemic caused global distress and the education sector had to bear the maximum heat due to restrictive measures (Onyema et al., 2020).

The study has discovered that the global pandemic has resulted in reduced workforce productivity, fluctuating incomes, impelling institutions to cover necessary costs, thus fracturing several establishments' academic & business processes (Tamrat, 2021).

The student employability rate in India is on the rise. These rates will be affected since the Covid-19 outbreak has abruptly halted offline learning. Other than absenteeism due to demanding online classes, students are dubious about the examinations. Additional uncertainty is brought over by the UGC, who have changed their stance several times on examinations. The shift from offline to online learning from home that is the new normal, which can be perceived through applications, webinars, and online lectures, are mediums that advance education in the revolutionary 4.0 era. This transition has encouraged both teachers & students to equip digital technology. Although, this has imposed students to venture into technology and create innovative ideas to complete the assigned tasks (Darma et al., 2020).

Teaching and Learning Practices during Covid 19

It is a critical yet vital decision to shift education online because of the Covid-19 pandemic World Health Organization, n.d. Institutions & Educators had to swiftly adapt to the switch from offline to online mode of teaching. They also had to undergo the arduous task of creating a learning ecosystem for both the students and the teachers given the changing situation in which the educational institutions had to operate. Also, practices linked to cognitive & social aspects of teaching were revealed (Carrillo & Flores, 2020).

Teachers from different fields & ages had to draw up and deliver their classes from home while overcoming technical & practical hurdles without any technical support (Hodges et al., 2020). An unforeseen request to switch the offline university courses to be taught online is the most significant difficulty faced by the faculty. Implementation of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is vital in online learning to craft courses that provide well-rounded learning experiences aided by digital technologies (Rapanta et al., 2020).

Questionnaire Development

A detailed questionnaire was developed taking the opinion of an expert panel comprising of academicians, school principals parents and students. The questionnaire was circulated among 767 respondents out of which we received 489 responses and after omitting the unfulfilled and partially filled responses a final data of 434 respondents was taken in to account. The data was analysed using SPSS and SEM.

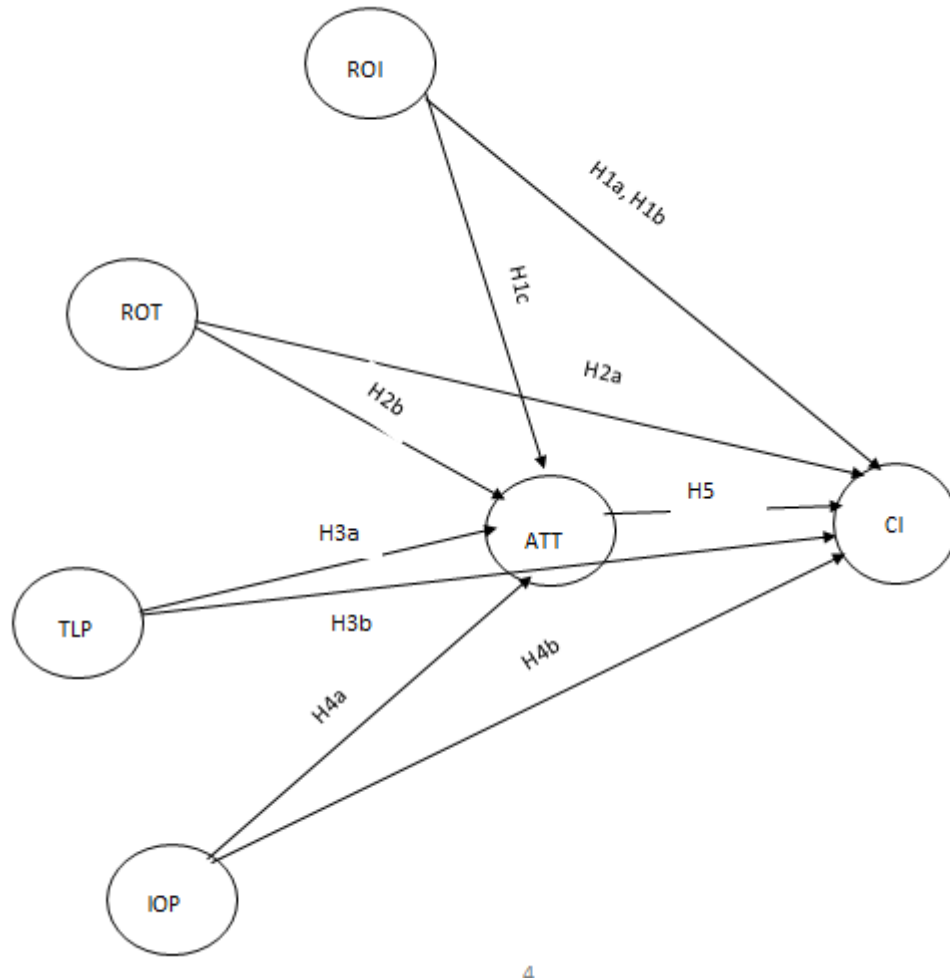


FIGURE 1
THEORETICAL MODEL OF THE PAPER

Role of Infrastructure

The teaching methodology has undergone mammoth changes with the advent of innovations in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). ICT has enabled the teachers to embrace the use of student intensive practices such as experiential learning that has aided the promotion of purposeful learning (Koh & Chai, 2014), inquiry-based learning (Bell et al., 2013) and learning through problem-solution. Few researchers have made tough urgings in favour of ICT as a reagent for a transformation of the teaching methodologies (Beauchamp & Kennewell, 2010). This model helps us to study the interface between the acquaintances of a faculty about

the expertise in the use of technology, medium of instruction, and content for worthwhile application of ICT for online teaching. Thus we propose the following hypothesis.

H₁: Infrastructure plays a significant role in shaping the attitude towards blended learning

H₂: Infrastructure plays a significant role in shaping the consumer intention towards blended learning

H₃: Language acts a barriers for blended learning

Role of Teachers

Many studies have been carried out on the factors that help teachers in getting themselves acquainted with the technology such as the implementation of e-learning practices among the students. (Boateng et al., 2016; Zhou & Xu, 2007) and teachers e.g. (Holzmann et al., 2020); (Salina et al., 2017); (Nicolle & Lou, 2008; Kotrlík & Redmann, 2009). Though, the Corona pandemic has given rise to a situation where in both the teachers and students are compelled to embrace the technology for the effective operation of the education system. This adoption has come with many challenges such as insufficient expertise on the part of teachers and students to use technology, problems in identifying a suitable platform to deliver classes, expenses involved in purchasing the license for the online platforms, and most importantly unavailability of wifi/internet facilities in remote locations. This gives us scope for research regarding the aspects that affect sustained use of technology for amalgamated learning for the benefit of the students.

H₁: Teachers play a significant role in shaping the attitude towards blended learning

H₂: Teachers play a significant role in shaping the consumer intention towards blended learning

Teaching and Learning Practices

Now, we need research that can focus on a strategy to guide behavioural changes amongst the students and faculty during online classes. In addition, an enormous focus must also be laid on the course delivery and conduction of online assessments (Halupa, 2015). The sudden change in the mode of delivery from physical to online has posed a major problem in front of the authorities pertaining to carrying out exams online. With regards to school education as a matter of need base approach students of the primary section were directly promoted to the next class on basis of their previous performance, online exams were conducted for students of higher class and physical examinations were conducted for those students who were appearing for Board exams.

H₃: Teaching and learning practices play a significant role in shaping the attitude towards blended learning.

H₄: Teaching and learning practices play a significant role in shaping the consumer intention towards blended learning.

Involvement of Parents

In this fast-moving life where time is a luxury there has been a substantial drop in the number of parents seeking face-to-face interaction with the school authorities to track the progress of their wards (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Surveys point out that parents have shown an inclination towards the usage of technology to maintain a channel of communication with the authorities. This has widened the scope for the usage of technology and led to the inception of numerous tech-based start-ups such as class dojo, spotlight, remind, and seesaw who have developed a communication channel to inform of text messages, videos and SMS alerts to monitor the activities of students and getting updates to form educational institutions. Several universities now use online tools to send messages to parents regarding assignments submission, grades, and attendance updates which have resulted in improved attendance percentage in the class and also enhanced the seriousness among the students (Beard & Wilson, 2018). They also used online platforms to send literacy tips which helped in improving the pass percentage among the students. It has also evoked interest among parents which has led to enhanced communication between the parents and educational institutions. The success stories of a few apps have been incorporated for an enhanced learning experience.

H₅: Parents play a significant role in shaping the attitude towards blended learning.

H₆: Parents play a significant role in shaping the consumer Intention towards blended learning.

Attitude of Students towards Online Teaching during Covid

Covid-19 called for a sudden shift to the online mode of learning, which created a divide amongst the educators who managed to adapt and others who are still grappling with this change (Salinas et al., 2017). In the survey conducted, most students appreciated the precautionary measures (i.e., institutions mandating students to leave campus & opting for online learning for the rest of their semesters), which were decided by considering the risks of the outbreak. Others who participated in the survey provided various answers such as distress & anxiety caused by online learning, frustration regarding graduation ceremonies, and the difference in the quality of online learning from face-to-face learning (Unger & Meiran, 2020). Positive aspects of online learning were reduced costs, efficient use of time, convenience, and an overall increase in participation. Whereas negative aspects were distraction & decreased focus, increase in workload allotted by educators & colleagues (Hussein et al., 2020). A positive effect induced by performance expectancy & facilitating conditions can be seen on behavioral intention and attitude. Although, effort expectancy failed to push teachers' adjustment to online teaching. On the contrary, social influence had an inconsequential relationship with attitude but a noteworthy relationship with behavioural intention. Attitude played a significant role in influencing behavioral intention (Tandon, 2021).

H₇: Attitude plays a significant role in shaping the consumer intention towards blended learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data was analysed through various test. The construct reliability was measured by performing Exploratory Factor Analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis and Discriminant validity

test was conducted to test the reliability of data and hypothesis testing was done by Structural Educational Modelling

Exploratory Factor Analysis

EFA was performed to test the reliability of constructs. (KMO) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was performed where the KMO value was 0.581 and Bartlett test value was 0 which proved that data is reliable and fit for further analysis. The acceptable value for KMO is 0.5 (Kaiser, 1974). To test the reliability of constructs Cron Bach Alpha test was performed whose value lied between 0.678-0.871. The minimum acceptable limit of Cronbach Alpha is 0.6. Factor loading was conducted for all the indicators and those indicators whose value was less than 0.6 were removed Table 1.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Amos 26 was used to perform the CFA test. To gauge the reliability index of the data mean and Standard Deviation was calculated. The value of SD was found to be lower than mean which indicated that data was authentic (Gershon, 2017). CR (Composite reliability) and AVE (Average Variance Extracted) were performed to measure the reliability of data. The value of AVE was above 0.5 and Value of CR was above 0.7 which indicated high reliability of data Table 2. Discriminant validity test was performed in which the values were lower than square root of Average Variance Extracted which signified reliability of constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) Table 3.

Structural Equational Modelling

Hypothesis testing was done by performing SEM through AMOS 26. T test and Path Coefficient test was performed to measure the hypothesis. For those hypotheses whose P value was <0.5 were accepted and whose p value was >0.5 were rejected refer Table 4. The mediating role of attitude was tested and direct and indirect effect was calculated Refer Table 5.

Sr.No	No.of Items	Percentage
Gender	Male	64%
	Female	36%
Age(in (years)	18-25 years	36%
	25-35 years	34%
	35-50years	19%
	50 years and above	10
Education	Under graduate	34%
	Post Graduate	66%

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Factor Loading
ROI1	4.70	0.814	0.665
ROI2	4.90	0.707	0.727
ROI3	4.08	1.104	0.623
ROT1	4.54	1.073	0.666
ROT2	3.90	0.863	0.728
TLP1	4.84	0.997	0.745
TLP2	3.78	1.112	0.645
IOP1	5.38	0.635	0.84
IOP 2	4.70	1.165	0.677

	CR	AVE	Cron bach Alpha
Role of Infrastructure (ROI)	0.735	0.582	0.612
(Role of Teachers) ROT	0.779	0.695	0.684
Teaching and Learning Practices (TLP)	0.765	0.648	0.657
Involvement of Parents (IOP)	0.730	0.619	0.894

	ROI	ROT	TLP	IOP
ROI	0.753			
ROT	-0.784	0.824		
TLP	0.666	-0.751	0.774	
IOP	0.773	0.784	0.698	0.726

Hypothesis	Path	P-value	T test	β	Comment
H ₁	ROI→ATT	0.035	.081	0.06	Supported
H ₂	LBB→ATT	0.536	-2.315	-0.42	Not Supported
H ₃	ROT→ATT	0.026	-0.62	-.015	Supported
H ₄	TLP→ATT	0.12	2.305	3.43	Supported
H ₅	IOV→ATT	0.021	0.33	0.54	Supported
H ₆	ATT→CI	0.038	0.41	.067	Supported

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Direct effect		Indirect effect			Total effect	
		β	p-value	Mediating Construct	β	p-value	β	p-value
H _{1b}	ROI → CI	0.33	0	Attitude	0.26	0.012	0.59	NS
H _{2b}	ROT → CI	0.88	0.013(***)	Attitude	0.025	0.042	0.905	0.067(**)
H _{3b}	TLP → CI	0.93	0.0127(***)	Attitude	0.038	0.02	0.968	0.0127(***)
H _{4b}	IOV → CI	0.345	0.0027(***)	Attitude	0.47	NS	0.815	0.0048(***)

Demographic Profile

From Table 1 we can infer that 64% of the respondents were male and 36% were female. 36% of the respondents were 18-25 years old, 34% of the respondents were 25-35 year old, and 19% of the respondents fell in the bracket of 35-50 years while the rest 10% were above 50 years of age. 66% of the respondents were post graduate while 34% were undergraduate.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Measure of Mediating Role of Attitude

From Table 5 we can inhibit that Hypothesis H₁ which discusses the relationship between Role of Infrastructure and Attitude towards blended learning was found to be significant ($P < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.06$). The study further revealed that Hypothesis H_{1c} which discusses the relationship between language barrier and attitude was found to be not significant. Interestingly Role of teacher which was reflected by hypothesis H₂ was found to have significant relationship with attitude towards blended learning ($P < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.15$). Hypothesis H₃ revealed that teaching and learning process has significant relationship in shaping the attitude towards blended learning ($P < 0.05$, $\beta = 3.43$). Interestingly the study of hypothesis H₄ exhibited that involvement of Parents had significant relationship with attitude towards blended learning. ($P < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.54$) (Morris, 2016). Hypothesis H₅ revealed a positive relationship between attitude and Consumer intention towards blended learning.

Influence of Factors on Shaping Consumer Intention towards Blended Learning

Table 6 shows the result of direct and indirect effect. Hypothesis H₁ reveals that relationship between Role of Infrastructure and consumer intention for Blended learning ($P < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.33$).

Hypothesis H₁ which propose the relationship between role of teachers and consumer intention was found to be significant ($P < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.88$). Interestingly hypothesis H₃ which discusses the relationship between teaching learning process and consumer opinion about blended learning was found to be significant. ($P < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.93$).

On testing the hypothesis H₄ it was found that relationship between involvement of parents and consumer intention for blended learning was found to be significant.

Implications

The amalgamation of digital tools in education has introduced the concept of blended learning which propagated the use of flipped classrooms for experiential learning (McClellan & Hyle, 2012). Usage of technology by teachers has enhanced their efficiency and they have adopted innovative practices such as uploading digital content and recorded lectures. In order to engage the students in a more meaningful way, the faculties have identified various methods in the experiential learning model (ELM) which enhance the impact on students (Kaiser, 1958). For example, certain universities to improve the presentation skill of their MBA students, have redesigned their entire curriculum utilizing the ELM model (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005). Another University went a step ahead when it allowed its medical students to record their interaction with the patients in their iPad which were equipped with Panopto's mobile app. Later they uploaded their video on the LMS platform of their universities which was evaluated by their faculties. Indian students faced a major hurdle in undergoing summer internships as it required the students to undergo training within the organization. The pandemic forced the offices to close down which in turn resulted in decreased opportunities for MBA students to learn the practical nuances of the corporate sector (Masten et al., 1990). Though some students managed to complete their internship online, they were deprived to learn from the office environment. Some institutions imparted research projects to the students depending upon their area of interest which helped them to handle the job interviews but still, it was not sufficient to develop the temperament to handle the office environment. It highlighted the need to develop a model for blended learning which incorporated both theoretical knowledge and practical learning for the students. These examples have been highlighted to draw attention towards Indian Business Schools where the concept of experiential learning through digital platforms is gaining fast. The education system needs to be revamped thoroughly in terms of infrastructure and teaching pedagogy to create the right ecosystem for blended learning.

CONCLUSION

The education system has witnessed a metamorphological change due to Covid-19. The Pandemic has given thrust to increase usage of technology in the education sector. It has forced reconfiguration of teaching pedagogy and forced the instructors to incorporate innovative teaching practices. Though it will not lead to the eradication of offline teaching methods, the future is ready for blended learning fuelled by online pivots and the digital frame of learning. However, the path to digitalization has its own sets of challenges that need to be tackled with due diligence. The focus should be on developing the right infrastructure which supports online teaching and learning. Attention should also be paid to the adoption of technology in teaching pedagogy. Course curriculum should be enriched with digital content like online learning materials and video lectures. Also, policy should be framed for designing experiential learning which enhances the employability of the students. Covid-19 has opened a new gateway in the field of education which needs to be explored and researched for formulating the right framework for blended learning. The authors have a strong belief that B schools in India have the adequate resource and willpower to tackle the situation and shall lay the foundation of a new form of digital communication between students and teachers.

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Received: 08-Feb-2022, Manuscript No. AMSJ-22-11384; **Editor assigned:** 10-Feb-2022, PreQC No. AMSJ-22-11384(PQ); **Reviewed:** 22-Feb-2022, QC No. AMSJ-22-11384; **Revised:** 24-Feb-2022, Manuscript No. AMSJ-22-11384(R); **Published:** 28-Feb-2022