Rethinking Tourism Education: Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism Education Owing to COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions in the global economy. By the end of the first quarter of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had brought international travel to an abrupt halt and significantly impacted the tourism industry. For many developed and developing countries, the tourism sector is a major source of employment, government revenue and foreign exchange earnings. Without this vital lifeline, many countries may experience a dramatic contraction in GDP and a rise in unemployment.

Just like the other industries the pandemic has also greatly affected the education too, which is a crucial determinant of the economic future of a nation. In an effort to control the spread of the pandemic most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions. In India, too the government was nowhere far behind in imposing nationwide lockdown. Tourism is also one of the industries to have suffered a major setback and so is Tourism Education. It is reasonable to assume that this impact will be here to stay for a fairly long time. Unlike the other industries which have resumed with norms of new normal the hospitality industry too will have to adapt, and very fast, to the post COVID-19 era. This pandemic is clearly a sign of changing times and human behavior. It is also an event that has given rise to push to digitalization of businesses, especially in the education sector. A new set of skills will be needed for a new way of doing hospitality: New ways of sitting the customers in a restaurant, of welcoming them in a hotel or flying them to their dream destination. And with the entire industry currently racing to adapt and transition to the new way of doing business, the hospitality education sector will also have to transform its curriculum, making it relevant to a post COVID-19 context by focusing it on teaching a much needed new set of skills. Adapting the business model, innovating the customer experience, re-thinking the offer and the overall product delivery

This disruption education delivery has lead the policymakers to brainstorm how to drive onscale engagement while ensuring inclusive e-learning solution and tackling the digital divide. Institutions have to make modifications in the course curriculum. The development of curriculum needs to be around the sense of responsibility while preparing the students for industry to work under crises. This paper takes into account how the learning opportunities to be created in order to rebuild tourism education.

Keywords: COVID-19; Pandemic; Education; Skill set

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak has impacted quite harshly to all domains of human existence. Educational institutions around the globe are also encountering tough times due to the pandemic and many are either closed or operating under online modes with its limited capacity. The educational institutions are endeavoring to seek newer ways of imparting knowledge by

adhering to social distancing and sanitation protocols to minimize the spread of the COVID-19. According to UNESCO (2020), these interruptions are impacting over 60% of the world's total population of students. Moreover, various countries have executed localized closures impacting millions of other students and learners.

COVID-19 has impacted significantly on teaching and learning in the domains of hospitality, leisure, and sport and tourism education and forced it to move from traditional classrooms to the digital classrooms whether digital or hybrid. Such changes have led to disruptions in teaching and learning in the arena of tourism, hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism education. These interruptions have impacted not only the students but, also the teachers and their families. The adoption of innovative modes of teaching and learning has not only produced tough challenges to the teachers but to students too. Responses to the pandemic have shed light on various social and economic issues, including student debt, digital learning, access to the internet, etc. [1-3].

The fast-tracking of technological tools and devices in the education system has led to an emerging need for technological know-how for both teachers and the students. For several years, teachers been debating and discussing digital transformation, but many remain uncertain about it. The reality is that online education cannot replace actual classroom education because the former lacks personalized attention and face to face interactions. The move towards digital learning is worrying because society wasn't entirely ready when COVID-19 happened. In the 21st century, the way we access/deliver information, impart knowledge, and ways of learning have changed. The COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant bearing on our lives have raised the need to adopt innovative ways of getting education services at all levels [4,5].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The UNESCO report estimates that the coronavirus pandemic will adversely impact over 290 million students across 22 countries. The UNESCO estimates that about 32 crores students are affected in India, including those in schools and colleges.

Therefore, the government has come up with e-learning program. Many ed-tech firms have tried to leverage the occasion by offering free online classes or attractive discounts on e-learning modules. These measures have been met with overwhelming response by students with some startups witnessing as high as 25% uptick in e-learning. Remote learning seems a viable solution to students during this time as they offer convenient, on-the-go and affordable access to lessons. E-learning also comes as an interesting and interactive alternative as compared to classroom teaching [6].

Nevertheless, COVID-19 has prompted experts to rethink the conventional mode of education. Digital education appears to be a viable solution to fill in the void for classroom education for a period of three to four months while minimizing the chances of any infection to students until classes resume. More importantly, it has also brought the hitherto peripheral issue of digital education in India to the center stage. Going forward,

digital education is likely to be integrated into mainstream education. This will enable inclusive education by facilitating learning across diverse geographies in India. Moreover, it will provide an opportunity for educators to come up with customized learning solutions for every student [7].

STRATEGY TOWARDS DIGITAL EDUCATION

Needless to say, the pandemic has transformed the centuries-old, chalk talk teaching model to one driven by technology. This disruption in the delivery of education is pushing policymakers to figure out how to drive engagement at scale while ensuring inclusive e-learning solutions and tackling the digital divide. A multi-pronged strategy is necessary to manage the crisis and build a resilient Indian education system in the long term [8].

One, immediate measures are essential to ensure continuity of learning in government schools and universities. Open-source digital learning solutions and Learning Management Software should be adopted so teachers can conduct teaching online. The DIKSHA platform, with reach across all states in India, can be further strengthened to ensure accessibility of learning to the students.

Two, inclusive learning solutions, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized, need to be developed. With a rapid increase of mobile internet users in India, which is expected to reach 85% households by 2024, technology is enabling ubiquitous access and personalization of education even in the remotest parts of the country. This can change the schooling system and increase the effectiveness of learning and teaching, giving students and teachers multiple options to choose from. Many aspirational districts have initiated innovative, mobile-based learning models for effective delivery of education, which can be adopted by others [9,10].

Three, strategies are required to prepare the higher education sector for the evolving demand supply trends across the globe particularly those related to the global mobility of students and faculty and improving the quality of and demand for higher studies in India. Further, immediate measures are required to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on job offers, internship programs and review projects.

Four, it is also important to reconsider the current delivery and pedagogical methods in school and higher education by seamlessly integrating classroom learning with e-learning modes to build a unified learning system. The major challenge in **ed-tech** reforms at the national level is the seamless integration of technology in the present Indian education system, which is the most diverse and largest in the world with more than 15 lakh schools and 50,000 higher education institutions. Further, it is also important to establish quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning developed and offered by India HEIs as well as e-learning platforms (growing rapidly). Many e-learning players offer multiple courses on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters. So, the quality of courses may differ across different e-learning platforms [11].

In this time of crisis, a well-rounded and effective educational practice is what is needed for the capacity-building of young minds. It will develop skills that will drive their employability, productivity, health, and well-being in the decades to come, and ensure the overall progress of India.

BENEFITS OF E-LEARNING

Fast access to information

The speed of students finding the right information can the asto nishing to many teachers.Websites are able to rank themselves well using links packages (reference here), thereby giving students the best information quickly. When students search for a question the teacher has asked, often the answer will be presented by search engines like google without even having to click through to a website. However, is this necessarily the best option? Could this mean that students no longer have to retain the knowledge, but instead just search for it on every occasion? However, recent studies have shown that with this exposure to more information, students have increased their ability to retain more information for longer periods [12].

Students are more connected

With social media platforms and chat apps, students are able to instantly communicate without other students. This has resulted in more integration in the classroom as well as after school finishes. Students can exchange ideas about tasks from school and quickly build their knowledge of a topic much faster than before. On the other hand, there has been reports of social media making bullying and harassment easier for those who wish to undertake such a nasty practise. This has been addressed by the social media platforms themselves as well as the schools and local government in order to stamp it out.

Speed of learning

Many technology advocates have pointed out that technology has now allowed students to learn at their own pace. This has been encouraged with apps and websites offering custom courses which allows the students to move through the course at a pace which suits them best. Often this can replace the need for parents to hire tutors outside of school time and in holidays as students can use these online courses instead.

More access to the teacher

If teachers also become involved in the technology, then they too can participate in the student's online experience. This gives the teacher the advantage of knowing when a student is possibly struggling with a topic or subject and can step in earlier than when it's exam time. Teachers can also give faster feedback on homework and assignments for students outside of school time. However, the downfall here is whether the teacher will be compensated for the additional workload outside of their usual hours [13].

CHALLENGES OF E-LEARNING

We already analyzed the numerous benefits of e-learning. Now, it's time to cover the opposite side of the coin. There are some major drawbacks to e-learning, and these problems often get pushed aside in online discussions. After all, who would want to put the brakes on educational innovation?

Looking at the industry as a whole also reveals plenty of enthusiasm, with the statistics of the E-Learning industry in 2020 showing massive growth. However, educators worldwide still recognize some major issues plaguing the industry. Let's have a closer look at these problems [14,15].

These are the disadvantages of E-Learning

Online student feedback is limited

In traditional classrooms, teachers can give students immediate face-to-face feedback. Students who are experiencing problems in the curriculum can resolve them quickly and directly either during the lecture or during the dedicated office hours. Personalized feedback has a positive impact on students, as it makes learning processes easier, richer, and more significant, all the while raising the motivation levels of the students.

E-Learning, on the other hand, still tends to struggle with student feedback. Students completing regular assessments become dissatisfied when they experience a lack of personalized feedback. The traditional methods of providing student feedback don't always work in an e-learning environment, and because of this, online education providers are forced to look towards alternative methods for providing feedback.

E-learning can cause social isolation

The E-Learning methods currently practiced in education tend to make participating students undergo contemplation, remoteness and a lack of interaction. As a result, many of the students and teachers who inevitably spend much of their time online can start experiencing signs of social isolation, due to the lack of human communication in their lives. Social isolation coupled with a lack of communication often leads to several mental health issues such as heightened stress, anxiety and negative thoughts [16].

E-Learning requires strong self-motivation and time management skills

Lack of self-motivation among students continues to be one of the primary reasons why students fail to complete online courses. In traditional classrooms, there are numerous factors which constantly push students towards their learning goals. Face-to-face communication with professors, peer-to-peer activities and strict schedules all work in unison to keep the students from falling off track during their studies.

In the setting of an online learning environment, however, there are fewer external factors which push the students to perform well. In many cases, the students are left to fend for themselves during their learning activities, without anyone constantly urging them on towards their learning goals. Students taking E-

Learning courses will find that they are often required to learn difficult materials in a comfortable home setting without any of the added pressure normally associated with traditional colleges. As a result, keeping up with regular deadlines during online studies can become difficult for those students who lack strong self-motivation and time management skills.

Lack of communicational skill development in online students

E-Learning methods are proven to be highly effective at improving the academic knowledge of the students. However, developing the communicational skills of the students is an area often neglected during online lessons. Due to the lack of face-to-face communication between peers, students and teachers in an online setting, the students might find that they are unable to work effectively in a team setting. Neglecting the communicational skills of the students will inevitably lead to many graduates who excel in theoretical knowledge, but who fail to pass their knowledge on to others [17].

Cheating prevention during online assessments is complicated

Unfortunately, one of the biggest disadvantages of e-learning continues to be cheating through various methods. Compared to on campus students, online students can cheat on assessments more easily as they take assessments in their own environment and while using their personal computer. The students cannot be directly observed during assessments without a video feed, making cheat detection during online assessments more complicated than for traditional testing procedures. Additionally, without a proper identity verification system in place, students taking online assessments might be able to let a third party take the assessment instead of themselves, resulting in a wholly fraudulent test result [12].

Online instructors tend to focus on theory rather than practice

Although this drawback of E-learning is starting to be addressed and fixed by some of the more innovative online learning platforms, the problem has yet to disappear completely. The problem is that a large portion of E-learning training providers choose to focus largely (in many cases entirely) on developing theoretical knowledge, rather than practical skills. The reason for this is evident theoretical lectures are considerably easier to implement in an online learning environment than practical lectures. After all, without face-to-face communication and physical classrooms to use as a workshop, implementing practical projects in an online course requires significantly more prior planning than theoretical training [18].

E-Learning lacks face-to-face communication

The lack of face-to-face communication ties together with many of the previously mentioned disadvantages of online learning. A lack of any kind of face-to-face communication with the instructor inhibits student feedback, causes social isolation, and could cause students to feel a lack of pressure. A lack of pressure is a disadvantage in the sense that it causes students to abandon their studies more easily. Constant nudging by professors may be undesirable for many, but it's an effective method for improving student retention [3].

E-Learning is limited to certain disciplines

All educational disciplines are not created equal and not all study fields can be effectively used in e-learning. For now, at least. e-learning tends to be more suitable for social science and humanities, rather than scientific fields such as medical science and engineering which require a certain degree of hands-on practical experience. No amounts of online lectures can substitute an autopsy for medical students or real-life industrial training for a budding engineer. While this could change in the future, we are currently not yet a point where we can fully teach all professions solely through e-learning.

Online learning is inaccessible to the computer illiterate population

96% of Americans own mobile devices, and around 73% of Americans own a personal computer. Therefore, it would be easy to argue that online education is easily accessible to most people. However, these statistics don't paint the whole picture. Despite the booming growth in technological capabilities, the rates of computer literacy are still far from perfect. The OECD average percentage of computer illiterate people hovers around 25%, meaning that a quarter of the population will have major trouble in accessing E-Learning as an educational method. And, these are OECD countries we are talking about, which are considered developed countries with a high-income economy.

In other parts of the world, the situation is often direr. In India, for example, despite the country being one of the major players in the world of E-Learning, there is still a large gap in computer literacy in the population. Until such gaps in society exist, online education will not be able to reach all citizens. Therefore, it's highly important that we look at online learning as an addition, rather than as a replacement to traditional education [19,20].

Lack of accreditation and quality assurance in online education

If E-learning is to be considered as effective and authentic as traditional learning, it must be ensured that all online schools are qualified and accredited. Unfortunately, at the current point in time, there are still a vast number of online learning platforms which are unaccredited and where all the materials are quality checked by no one besides the instructors themselves. As such, poor quality assurance and a lack of accredited online learning providers continue to weaken the legitimacy of online education.

DISCUSSIONS

- Researchers have demonstrated successful examples of peer feedback systems in online learning, which could be a

potential solution to the problem of limited student feedback in e-learning. Additionally, this disadvantage of E-learning is sometimes solved through video chats with professors, which function similarly to the professor's office hours during on-campus training.

- Some of the ways to combat loneliness and social isolation in online learning could be
  A. Promoting increased interaction between online students.
  B. Utilizing blended learning environments.
  C. Monitoring the students for signs of social isolation.
- Building strong self-motivation and disciplinary skills is key to succeeding in an online learning environment. Additionally, face-to-face communication with professors can be substituted with online communication, and peer-to-peer activities should be promoted between online students similarly as it would be in traditional classrooms.
- Peer-to-peer group activities and online lectures which require communication must be used even in an online learning environment. In doing so, we can ensure that e-learning does not fail to teach students the communicational skills necessary to succeed in real working environments.
- In order to protect the authenticity of online education, anti-cheating measures must be put in place by any online education institution. The most popular anti-cheating tools currently used in e-learning are online proctoring systems such as examity, which use various anti-cheating measures such as automated ID verification and machine learning to detect fraudulent test-takers.
- Implementing hands-on student projects in conjunction with 1:1 mentorship are some of the most effective ways of developing practical skills in online students. There are several examples of successful practice-based online courses on platforms such as udacity and Springboard.
- In E-Learning, face-to-face communication must be substituted with another method of communication. For example, video chats, discussion boards, and chartrooms could help deal with the negative effects associated with a lack of face-to-face communication during online learning.
- For some disciplines such as medical education, blended learning could serve as an excellent alternative to fully online learning. In the case of nursing students, review showed that blended learning courses achieved similar posttest results as traditional course formats while increasing the satisfaction ratings of the participating students significantly.
- Finding a solution to the complex problem of raising computer literacy is no easy task. However, initiatives such as Digital India show promise in improving the computer literacy rates amongst the population.
- There are numerous considerations for quality assurance of E-Learning, and they must be followed in order to ensure the authenticity of E-Learning. Additionally, there are accreditation management systems such as creatrix which provide a centralized solution for the accreditation process.

CONCLUSION

For a while now, educators around the world have been talking about the need to rethink how to educate future generations. This might just be the disruption that the sector needed to rethink how to educate, and question what is needed to teach and what the students are prepared for.

As addressed above, technology is playing a major role in transforming the modern classroom. Although there may be some speed humps along the way, it is believed it's here to stay and should be adopted by teachers across the world to help improve their students' learning.

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