The Impact of Covid-19 on Media Education in India

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ABSTRACT
Media education is driven by training as well as understanding of the theory of journalistic practices. As the technology enhances the potential of journalism to be more accurate and multimedia based, the training is also geared up. In this context Covid-19 pandemic has impacted heavily on learners and teachers. The training has suffered but innovative ways to train students using online learning mode provided some respite. The paper is an attempt to provide an account of trauma, stress and difficulties that the media courses facing during the pandemic. The study interaction with the stakeholders brought both positive and negative characteristics of online learning. The conclusions focussed on suggestions helpful for future planning of the media courses and online learning.

Keywords: Media Education, Covid-19, Pandemic, Online learning, video production, practical courses.
Introduction

The Covid infection (COVID-19) first showed up in Wuhan city of China toward the end of 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it as ‘pandemic’ on 11th March, 2020 due to overall diffusion of COVID-19 (WHO, 2020). The outcome of a pandemic is on each field of education. The education fields including schools, universities and colleges got shut. In spite of the fact that it is a remarkable condition throughout the entire existence of media education, COVID chances to appear from the detailed classroom teaching model to another time of the digital model (Jena 2020). But there are different disciplines which are based on theory as well as laboratory or practical components of learning. Online education is one of the viable options chosen to impart education during a pandemic. During the pandemic situation, E-learning tools played an imperative role in schools and college education. It helped in facilitating student learning during the lockdown. (Subsedi et al., 2020). The terminations of the educational institutions because of the epidemic of COVID-19 had a great impact on education. A critical positive result of COVID-19 furthermore detailed learning skill and displays by embracing digital based learning techniques (Gonzalez et al., 2020). The challenges posed by online education include the digital divide and network poverty among the students, schools and regions. Hardware and network poverty are on one side and adapting to the online learning mechanism by both the teachers and students is on the other side. As per United Nations (2020), “As of July 2020, 8.6% of learners worldwide were affected by the pandemic, representing 1.725 billion children and youth, from pre-primary to higher education, in 200 countries Therefore, making learning possible and available from home schooling has been the need of the hour”.

Media or Mass Communication and Journalism education is severely hit by the pandemic. The training of the future filmmakers and journalists involves studio exercises, outdoor shoots, reporting from the field, packaging of content in the media lab are some to mention. Teaching theory courses are comparatively easier than explaining a camera operation. Pre-production, script writing type of work can be done in groups online but the production of the media content has posed a challenge. The situation has forced the students to limit their learning. As the pandemic is rising again after a short span the practical training with staggered batches of students is also coming to a halt.
According to Rao & Kusuma (2020), the threat of COVID-19 enforced the entire globe to shift over to online communications for professional, education and personal dealings. Teachers and students need to download the required application. Students can utilize a cell phone, PC, or work area for their online investigation. There are many learning applications offering transient online courses, with customized content appropriate for present-day cultural requirements. Portable learning upholds the cycle of intuitive commitment among educators and students in more manners that are imaginative. This may help to get to consider material in different arrangements, text, and video, sound and improves correspondence among educators and students.

Technical equipment for media content production is always expensive. It is also important that every media school in India does not have sufficient equipment or no equipment to train the students. Digitization and advancement in technology made the video production equipment affordable for the government institutes. Mass communication education receives good response from the students due to the craze associated with the news and entertainment. Hands-on training on the media equipment is one of the major attractions for the students. Some students are equipped with Digital still photo cameras, often used for video filming and laptops. It is not the situation across the student community. The disparity among them brought a great learning gap due to it. According to Pokhral & Chhetri (2021), “Online face-to-face classes (video) is encouraged by most; however, some students (economically disadvantaged) have expressed that the face-to-face online class consumes more data packages”. The authors depicted that the teachers are very confused with regards to whom to tune in to and which tools to use in their respective online teaching. It is hard to plan a valid framework to fit the adapting needs and comfort of the scholars.

There are a variety of exercises which train the students not only on the technicalities of the equipment but also research, creative thinking and collaborative work. As the field is highly creative it is driven by the team work and the physical presence of the student is a must. In India the use of virtual reality and other immersive technologies are lacking for the educational purpose. Though many institutes delayed the training part and completed the practical exercise in staggered batches but rising case of Covid shattered the plans. There are strong protests to complete the training and opening up of the institutes. Authorities kept trying to find ways to conduct
examinations and clear the backlog of teaching. After a few experiments open book examination has emerged as one of viable options.

During the first phase of pandemic teachers at higher education tried different ways to reach out to the students. Later on, institutions started buying the subscriptions of conferencing platforms. One of the most popular which has emerged as a Saviour is www.zoom.com. Keeping the potential www.google.com has developed with more features on their platform ‘google meet’. The other notable platforms include WebEx, skype, Microsoft teams, Goto meetings etc. Though there are open source platforms like jitsi.org available mostly the above platforms are widely chosen. The internet speed is depending on the locality and the telecom company specific. It also depends on the mobile handset. Whether it is a basic handset or a smartphone the hardware features enable the speed of the internet accordingly.

It is an exceptionally disturbing circumstance for the future experts and should be concentrated altogether, to think of suggestions and steps to overcome the mental health issues of the students. So far there is no assessed research accessible about the situation with psychological wellness approaches because of COVID-19 of students in the Indian situation. Consequently, to stay away from the adverse consequences of this pandemic, there is a most extreme need of contemplating the variation of emotional well-being among the passing out learners (Kumari et al., 2021).

The focus group discussions were conducted with media students in Delhi. Purposive sampling method was used to select the students to study the role and impact of online teaching during Covid 19. The sample size was 30 Postgraduate students from Jamia Millia Islamia, Guru Gobind Indraprastha University and University of Delhi. The discussion was also conducted to understand their status of mental health with respect to the level of stress, anxiety and anger issues experienced by them. The focus group discussion was conducted online in three groups. Each group consists of 10 students from each college. The thematic analysis was done in context to digital divide, mental and physical health, and technical issues. Information and data presented in the present study are collected from several articles and reports on COVID-19 pandemic.

The Impact

During the lockdown because of COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of
the students who took part in the focus group discussion were found to comprehend the seriousness of the pandemic. The vast majority of the students were confronting the issues of anxiety, stress and anger. The concern factor was significantly affecting the students. Students were more worried about their future protections like work, further examinations, employment and so forth which should be dealt with. The study tracked down that numerous students faced many problems in e-learning and extent of students were not in favour of online programs. During the online classes, the majority of the students revealed that they felt cheated and kept writing letters of dissent to the authorities to practice their learning. Though some of the institutes tried training students in staggered batches, it proved to be difficult as the teacher needed to repeat exercises again and again and it only resulted in increasing the workload. As the pandemic raised the hostels and mess facilities were closed for the students. The hostel students had to travel back home as well as those students staying outside the hostels are also gone back home. It is difficult to bring students from faraway places and make the arrangements for their stay. Those students who are not able to come back and find a stay will be losing the opportunity.

**Digital Divide**

There are a number of conferencing platforms to bring teaching online. Choosing of the platform initially left to the teachers, but later slowly by understanding the need of the hour different platforms are subscribed by different universities. It is tracked down that most of the students were using android portable for e-learning. The platforms like google meet, zoom, WebEx have limitations for its free versions in terms of number of users, features, tools to record, mark attendance etc. The online learning levied unexpected costs on the students for internet and electricity. A one-hour class will cost nearly one gigabyte of the internet and a dedicated device like laptop, desktop or smartphone. Uninterrupted electricity is one challenge and the other is the internet. Kapasia, et al (2020) states, “Students from remote areas and marginalized sections mainly denied online learning due to the lack of electricity and internet connectivity. Poverty further exacerbates the problem of the digital learning process in this unwanted crisis period”. Each telephone network has its focus areas and packages. They are different for each region, students when they go back are affected by its charges. Telecom companies have not shown any mercy to reduce the price. During the pandemic reduction of interest rates on loans, free access to paid digital academic resources
but free and fair internet access that become a basic human right for communication in everyday life could not be provided by the government. Students from distant regions and minimized segments essentially face tremendous difficulties for the examination during this pandemic. One of the respondents said, “I had to travel 30 kms to attend the online class because my home internet connection was not working properly. It used to get disconnected after some time. It was very difficult for me to interact in the class and submit assignments timely”. The students were additionally dealing with issues identified with helpless internet availability, trailed by the shortfall of a great climate to learn at home. Students living in far off zones confronted helpless internet networks. In addition, poor financial. It ought to be referenced that the internet learning measure is frequently prejudicial. Students from distant regions and underestimated areas fundamentally denied web-based learning because of the absence of power and web availability.

**Impact on Health: Mental and Physical**

Emotional well-being is quite possibly the main worry that is relied upon to increase on a regular schedule. Because of this pandemic and lockdown, the students likewise are confronting different emotional wellness issues like misery, restlessness and anger (Banerjee, 2020). Numerous students have revealed issues of emotional wellness and worsening of their manifestations. Students have been dealing with different issues identified with sorrow, nervousness, helpless web availability, and troublesome examination climate at home.

Health has been a continuous concern and a stumbling block. Physical and mental health of the students’ peers and their parents destabilizes the imparting education and learning. Mental health issues like depression, stress, anxiety, and dullness become a part of students’ lives. Students whose family members are affected with COVID-19 are more prone to mental health issues. Unfortunately, there is no systematic and scientific arrangement of cyclonical help provided to the teachers, staff and students. Guidance, counselling and patient healing to the students is very important for a healthy educational system during pandemic. Raju (2020) said, “There is a need to receive creative teaching for proceeding with training and to conquer mental pressure during the lockdown”. During the focus group discussion, one of the respondents said, “I could not concentrate in the online class due to long sessions. The teaching was not clear and effective. I used to
feel very tired, bored and low. Earlier I used to stay with my friends but due to COVID-19 my friends went to their hometown. I was alone and frustrated”. The duration of the class has a direct effect on the physical and mental health of the learners. In the first spell of the COVID-19 initially teaching is transferred to online classes and results in long hours of sitting in front of the bright screen. Often affected by irregular networks and electric connections. Later MHRD reduced the time to 45 minutes as reenable duration of the online class but it did not specify the details and weekly engagement in terms of duration, assignment and as

Examination’s systems have been irregular and unfair to check the students’ knowledge. As the country has adopted a choice-based credit system (CBCS) which allows continuous assessment during the study of a course. In the actual examination pattern, a large number of marks are decided on final examinations defeating CBCS format. There should be papers that should be practical or also having theory based on examination at the end of the semester. Practical’s are so intense that they should be evaluated on the basis of creative artefacts designed by them.

One of the respondents said, “I used to have a very bad headache during the online sessions. I had to visit a doctor and he said my eyesight has become very weak due to the extensive laptop screen time. I started wearing spectacles to avoid my headache”. Eye stress is the main problem for the student. Students need to attend at least three to five classes a day, which increases the students’ screen time. High amount of screen time involves long hours of staring at the bright screen. Assignments also add to the screen time as some of them need to be answered online in the LMS platforms. Some students after class checkout on social media games and related websites. Students tend to forget this also adds to their screen time.

**Technical Issues**

More than the video audio inputs and output issues are heavily dealt with during the online teaching. Troubleshooting the technical issues is a big tension for the students. These technical issues disturb the teachers, students and the rest of the class. The social media attracts and disturbs the concentration of the students during the class. Due to all these students are spending more time on the screen. The screen time increases and physical activities decrease. Teachers are doing their part by teaching but it’s up to the learners to choose to learn or not. During the pandemic almost, every educational institute has
conducted online workshops, training sessions and lengthy lectures. Network and technical issues never end in online classes. A student network never cooperates as there are so many classes happening. The network is very unstable for the learners. Covid has not only changed students’ learning but also it affects their daily lives. It has brought us lockdowns which is slowly driving them to depression. Because of lockdown one cannot go out to do physical activities in terms of exercises, playing and fitness.

**Alternative Solutions**

Smartphones have emerged as a major alternative in training young media professionals online. Though they are not in a group but individually and collaborating through digital cloud spaces, the learning continued. The mobile phone revolution brought content production as an everyday affair. Ease of usage and affordability to shoot, edit and host on multiple digital platforms, social media made smartphone filmmaking popular. Media schools across India adopted the idea of smartphone filmmaking as one of the viable options in the place of shooting with high end professional equipment available at the institutes. Whether the courses are digital or non-digital everything has to adapt to the digital format and online teaching and learning mode. For example, traditional folk media courses have done their projects like street theatre developed script development as physical performance is not advisable, on the other hand puppetry is done in designing miniature paper form and recorded with the mobile phone for submission. Even the studio exercises, scripting, and idea discussion are increasingly done with mobile phones and shared with the online learning management systems (LMS) like google classroom. As rightly found by Rao, T. S., & Kusuma, K. S. (2020) that learning through mobile phones has been the prime choice for students during the pandemic.

The animation, graphics and visual effects courses are emerging choices for the media students, which helps them get jobs in a variety of media sectors. The training is given on highly configured computers, which can run graphic oriented software’s like Maya, 3D and video editing. As the pandemic did not allow them to access departmental computers, it became a loss of them and created a divide in terms of those who have personal computers did not lose much as compared to those who are mainly depended on the departmental computers. Some of the departments started teaching on alternative free software’s as well as providing them screen recorded training modules, so that when
the Covid restrictions ease students are brought to departments in staggered batches to learn on the machine. The collaborative teaching and learning happened with the use of softwares like Team viewer, Any desk, Quick Assist etc to troubleshoot the hardware issues of the students remotely.

Conclusions

COVID-19 has obstructed the education division of India. Everyone kept indulging in worrying about the damage that Covid has been doing but it is also important to assess what we have learnt from it. It has taught us to stay at home and adapt to new emerging situations of Covid like situations. Fighting with death, struggling to arrange medicare, news of losing known friends and family members continuously shaken the system and greatly impacted. The excessive use of television news, news and information on social media has greatly impacted them in terms of adding grimness and stress, monotony and worry for the future.

Because of the circumstances in Covid-19, numerous students were experiencing the ill effects of pressure, uneasiness, and misery, so it is important to offer enthusiastic help to understudies. Future work toward this path could be to examine the relationship of various pressure busters on the psychological wellness of the students. Also, rules ought to be made to expect the requirements of the weak under privileged students. The access of technology, lab or training driven courses needs to empower the learning with their access and aid to improve the infrastructure not only in urban centres but also rural and remote places (India, G. O., 2020).

The Indian Government and associates of education explored the scope of Open and Distance learning (ODL) by implementing diverse computerized developments to adapt up to the current emergency of COVID-19. Though universities offered a centralized counselling facility, it is not part of the regular system where they voluntarily chose to approach. Educational institutions should engage more trained Counsellors, psychiatrists. Regular sensitization and awareness workshops needed to be conducted to teachers and all stakeholders to understand the issue of new generation students.

The education system should be more open in terms of letting the students decide when they are willing to graduate. The labs and training facilities should be open to them to get the best from the institutional facilities. The centralised system of having the lab and
training facilities online will also help students to choose the nearest place to opt to earn their credits to complete their degrees. SWAYAM initiative will have another advantage to offer to students with centralization of facilities coupled with the online MOOCs. New Educational Policy (2020) laid the road map for online and digital learning with inclusive access to all.

REFERENCES


