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Confronting New Realities: Factors Impacting Adoption and Success of Online Marketing Education in the Caribbean

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

COVID-19 was a watershed event in higher education as institutions at all levels were affected. Schools, colleges, and universities were forced to transition to remote or online instruction with varying levels of preparation. While most colleges and universities in the developed world were taken by surprise, they were not completely unprepared, as most institutions already had the infrastructure to facilitate online learning. In fact, some institutions were already offering online or hybrid courses of study. The developing world, and the Caribbean in particular, faced a different challenge. While institutions utilized learning management systems to deliver face-to-face classes, the facilitation of online courses was uncommon. Learning management systems were not equipped to manage facilitation of all courses offered, remote access to lab software had never been done, students did not have the requisite hardware, software or network access to fully participate in online classes. The learning curve was steep and both students and faculty had to adapt to the new realities fairly quickly. Fast forward to the present, three years into the global pandemic and the post-pandemic future is upon us. As more universities transition back to in-person learning, there are new challenges to navigate.

Panel Rationale

While it is accepted that higher education will never be what it was before the global pandemic, the new era in higher education brings its own set of challenges, some unique to the developing world. How will Jamaican universities fare in the post-pandemic era?

Many students have adapted to online modalities and are no longer in face-to-face learning. A recent survey of 1,434 Jamaican undergraduate business students revealed that only 28.3% were interested in taking in-person classes in Spring 2023. Some universities, whose programs were designed for face-to-face delivery are eager to return to “normal”, while others are happy to take advantage of students’ growing preference for online learning. However, there are a number of factors to consider where student, faculty and institutional resources are concerned. Additionally, institutions must consider the weaknesses in the Jamaican infrastructure that severely affects both online delivery as well as the online learning experience for students.

In this panel, we discuss these issues from both the student and educator's perspectives. The discussion will focus on three specific areas:

Factors Affecting Attitudes Towards And Success In Online Marketing Education In Jamaica

Panelists will discuss the characteristics of students in developing countries, their attitudes to online education and the factors that affect their success. The traditional college student who is 18-25 years old, studying full-time, with support from family and/or financial aid is now the exception rather than the norm. Students regardless of age are engaged in full-time or almost full-time employment based on financial need and their reluctance to assume significant debt to finance education. With classes moving online and many of the class sessions being recorded, students have been even more inclined to seek employment as they think they can "juggle" the responsibilities of education and employment. A growing number of students have even sought employment outside of the island through "work and travel" programs. While the idea of working while studying is not new or unique to Jamaica, there are some characteristics of the local landscape that present unique challenges.

Jamaican college students are primarily employed in clerical, customer service and other blue-collar jobs with little scheduling flexibility, which makes attending face-to-face classes difficult. A recent survey of undergraduate business students revealed that half (50.5%) of respondents have joined online classes from work and almost a third (29.6%) were joining online classes during working hours. What are the implications of these arrangements for the quality of their educational engagement and outcomes? What are the factors that affect their likelihood of success?

Online education had not been a part of Jamaican culture prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. How do students view this modality? Do they consider themselves to be getting the full college experience while online or do they think they are missing out? This discussion will focus on the perspectives of undergraduate Marketing students currently pursuing the Bachelor of Business Administration degree program.

Challenges With The Delivery Of Quantitative And Practical Marketing Courses In An Online Environment - The Jamaican Experience

In this section, panelists examine how practical and/or lab-based marketing courses have evolved in the online environment. In traditional settings, these courses were delivered in lab-based or seminar-type instructional settings. Remote learning has necessitated more student led and/or independent learning. Under resourced institutions are unable to offer remote or free student access to specialized software or equipment. Students are either unable or unwilling to purchase these resources themselves. As a result, lecturers have had to adapt both curriculum and teaching methods to these realities. How have these courses fared in the online environment, given the unique challenges in under resourced institutions? Are we still achieving our learning objectives? How can these courses be effectively delivered in the online environment, given that most students are unwilling to engage in face-to-face learning?

Navigating The Post-Pandemic (Covid-19) Reality In The Case Of Jamaica – F2f/Online/Hybrid Considerations

The COVID-19 pandemic may not be over but many countries are over it. Educational institutions at all levels are now trying to capitalize on the lessons learned and respond to the new environment. Many students have become comfortable in the online space and enjoy the flexibility afforded them by the asynchronous learning opportunities. Others are clamoring for a return to the classroom as they are struggling to learn online. They also want to return university campuses so they can enjoy other aspects of college life and get away from their homes and parents. Faculty members are equally divided about staying online or returning to the classroom.

Panelists will discuss the case of the School of Business Administration (SOBA) at the University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech, Ja). SOBA is currently devising a plan to return students who desire this modality to in-person classes while others will remain online. SOBA is the largest school at UTech, Ja. and is home to 40% of the UTech, Ja student population. Having built a reputation as a hands on program that produces work-ready graduates, a predominantly online program has major implications for the marketing program's highly practical course offerings. Faculty have to devise a long-term strategy that maintains the program's reputation, while responding to the needs for more flexible learning options. What is the way forward?

Keywords: *Marketing education, Online education, Online marketing education*

References are available from the authors upon request.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Petula Senior is a lecturer at the University of Technology, Jamaica with over 20 years academic experience teaching marketing at the undergraduate level. Her areas of specialization are Consumer Behavior and Service Marketing. She holds a Master of Science Degree in Business at the University of Salford, UK, a Bachelor of Law Degree from the University of Technology, Jamaica and postgraduate diploma in Education.