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Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Marketing of Education

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many schools to partially or totally switch to remote communication methods for delivering education in the years 2020-2021. It is believed that forced compliance with unfamiliar and even unpreferred modes of behavior can have a profound and lasting impact on people's attitudes and opinions toward the behavior itself because of first-hand exposure and experience. It is, therefore, possible that this experience with remote teaching and learning could have materially changed both instructors' as well as students' attitudes toward remote delivery of education. Such changed attitudes may predict their future choices and behavior.

This paper will present the important facets of education delivery systems identified, and the survey instrument developed to explore three areas: instructors' and students' prior attitudes and behaviors toward alternative education delivery modes, their experiences during the pandemic, and the effect of the experience on their attitudes. The paper will also present the results of a pilot study conducted using a sample of student respondents.

Keywords: COVID-19, higher education, marketing, delivery modes, remote teaching

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the world's most unexpected challenges in 2020–2021. The virus, transmittable through the physical proximity of an infected person, by contact, or through air, spreads serious illness and death across the world faster than a wild forest fire. It made people afraid of one another as carriers of the deadly disease. It shut down schools, hotels, restaurants, travel, tourism, theaters, stadia, and virtually all social interaction and livelihood activities. It made people avoid physical proximity with one another, making social distancing and wearing a mask a norm. It changed our way of life.

While we all were hoping that life would get back to “normal” soon, there was a concern that the new normal may be quite different from the old normal people were used to. The pandemic forced people into alternative modes of education

delivery with an intensity and urgency that many had not experienced before. The need for social distancing in classrooms and the limitation of classroom space forced all classes to switch, partially or totally, to remote learning, online lectures and exams, and even asynchronous remote learning.

It is believed that forced compliance with unfamiliar and/or unpreferred modes of behavior can have a profound and lasting impact on people's attitudes and opinions toward the behavior itself because of the first-hand experience and exposure to its true pros and cons. It can, therefore, be expected that the forced switch to remote communication methods for delivering education during the pandemic could have materially affected both education providers' and consumers' - that is, instructors' as well as students' - attitudes toward remote delivery of education. And such changed attitudes could be indicators of their future choices and behavior.

This paper presents the important facets of the education delivery systems identified, and the survey instrument developed to assess students' prior attitudes and behaviors before the pandemic toward the alternative education delivery modes, their experiences during the pandemic, and the effect of the experience on their attitudes after the pandemic. The paper also presents the results of a pilot study conducted using a sample of student respondents.

Literature Review

This research focused on the formation of attitudes and the effect of forced behavior and experience in changing long-held attitudes and beliefs. Abundant research literature exists on attitude formation and change.

Attitudes

Attitude describes a person's relatively consistent evaluations, feelings, and tendencies toward an object or idea. The ABC Model of Attitudes proposes that attitudes have three components: Affect, Behavior, and Cognition. In other words, people's attitude toward an object consists of three dimensions: people's cognition or knowledge and beliefs about the object, their affect or subjective feelings and emotions toward the object, and their actual behavior or experience with the object. (Solomon, 2020, p. 276)

Researchers have used this conceptualization in exploring the effect of attitude, lifestyle, and group conformity on buyer behavior (Chih, Liou, & Hsu, 2015; Setiawan, Herawati, Ratnawita, Rijal, & Pratiwi, 2023)

All attitudes are not equal in their strength. The strength of an attitude, defined by “commitment to the attitude,” is measured at three levels from the lowest to the highest: Compliance (where the primary reason for the attitude is to receive a reward or avoid punishment), Identification (where the attitude represents a person’s conformity to another person or group), and internalization (where it becomes a part of the person’s value system and is thus self-sustained.) (Solomon, 2020, p. 279)

Attitude Change

Attitudes put people into a frame of mind of liking or disliking things, of moving toward or away from them. As such, attitudes are difficult to change. (Armstrong & Kotler, 2023, p. 149)

Leon Festinger first investigated cognitive dissonance as a psychological phenomenon that affects human behavior.

Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory suggests that people have a psychological need and drive to keep the three components of our cognition (knowledge and beliefs), affect (subjective feelings), and behavior (actions) consistent with one another to keep mental harmony. (Festinger, 1957; Wixon & Laird, 1976)

This is known as the Cognitive Consistency principle (McLeod, 2023) or Balance Theory, which explains why people try to keep harmony among the three components of attitude: knowledge and beliefs, feelings, and actions. (Solomon, 2020, p. 280).

The principle of cognitive consistency provides one primary reason for attitude changes: to keep the three components in harmony.

Facilitating Attitude Change

One excellent technique marketers use to facilitate such change in attitude is to provide not only persuasive information and arguments about the innovations but also to provide the actual experience of using and enjoying the innovation. The

story of how Sara Blakely, the founder of women's foundationwear, persuaded the purchasing executive of Neiman Marcus by demonstrating the product is a case in point. It excellently illustrates this approach of changing together two components of attitude, namely cognition and behavior (product experience), to create a strong basis for balance in the changed attitude. (Armstrong & Kotler, 2023, p. 149; Capritto, 2020)

Forced Compliance Theory and the Stockholm Syndrome

If such voluntary innovation experience (behavior component of attitude) can help change attitudes toward the innovation, what would happen if such experience was forced on people? Will it also help make the attitude more favorable toward that behavior? That is what is explored by several studies on the effect of forced compliance on attitude.

The Forced Compliance Theory, a corollary to the theory of Cognitive Dissonance, suggests that forced compliance with a previously unfamiliar or unpreferred behavior would result in changing people's attitude to a more favorable one toward that behavior (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959).

In August 1973, in Stockholm, Sweden, in a botched robbery, four employees of Sveriges Kreditbank were held hostage in the bank's vault for six days. During the standoff, an incongruous bond developed between captives and their captors. This phenomenon, since described as the Stockholm Syndrome, illustrates the forced compliance theory, which suggests that "if a person is induced to do or say something contrary to his private opinion, there will be a tendency for him to change his opinion so as to bring it into correspondence with what he has done or said.

The Stockholm syndrome is often used to explain why, in many cases of kidnapping or hostage-taking, the victims develop feelings of trust or affection toward their captors. (Lambert, 2018; Holland, 2019; Bailey, Dugard, Smith, & Porges, 2023)

Remote Learning and Student Attitudes

Literature review shows studies exploring students' attitudes toward remote learning (Pusey & Nanni, 2022; Sukandi, 2022; Burbage, Yuane, & Hoang, 2022), students' study behavior during remote learning (Vollman, Scheepers, Nieboer, & Hilverda, 2022), and effects on remote learning outcomes, of factors such as

students' personality traits (Dikaya, Avanesian, Dikiy, Kirik, & Egorova, 2021), and student's prior attitudes toward remote learning (Aoe et al., 2023).

However, these studies did not explore the effects of forced remote learning on students' attitudes and behavior toward remote learning after the experience during COVID-19.

Literature on Other Effects of Forced Compliance

Some recent studies have explored the effects of forced compliance on attitude change in areas such as the effect of non-compliance of administrative officers with court decisions (Pattipawae, Salmon, & Lainsamputty, 2022), the effect of tax collection letters on taxes collected (Akasyah & Juitania, 2022) and comparison of the effects of forced compliance in virtual reality vs physical reality (Dzardanova, Kasapakis, Gavalas, & Sylaiou 2022).

Thus, while some studies have explored remote learning and student attitudes without linking the two causally, others have explored the effect of forced compliance in fields other than education.

Focus of this Research: Effect of Forced Compliance on Attitudes Toward Remote Learning

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to fill the gap and investigate whether the forced use of and the experience with remote communication methods during the pandemic had changed students' attitudes and preferences toward various face-to-face, hybrid, and remote learning alternatives.

To accomplish this, the following specific objectives were identified for this research:

- Identify alternative Education Delivery Modes Available Before the Pandemic and Those Still Available After the Pandemic
- Relative Importance of Various Learning Activities to Students in Defining, Judging, and Receiving Quality Education
- Selection Criteria Used by, and their Relative Importance to, Students in Choosing Delivery Modes for Different Classes

- Ratings of Alternative Education Delivery Modes Available on Each of the Selection Criteria
- Student Choices of Alternative Education Delivery Modes Before the Pandemic
- Students' Likely Choices of Alternative Education Delivery Modes After the Pandemic
- Students' Demographic Information for Classification Purposes

Conduct of the Research and Select Findings

Alternative Education Delivery Modes Available Before the Pandemic and Those Still Available After the Pandemic

Several alternative education delivery modes have been available and commonly used by schools in higher education for some time and well before the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021. These modes and their brief explanations are listed below:

1. Fully In-Person Classes
 - = Fully in-person classes, all students attend all classes together
2. Combined In-Person and Remote Hybrid Classes
 - = all students attend together in person, but only alternate class meetings are held in person. The other half of the classes are conducted remotely, either synchronously or asynchronously
3. Fully Remote Synchronous Classes
4. Fully Remote Asynchronous Classes
 - = No live interactions; all learning through textbooks, notes, documents, and videos

* Combined In-Person and Remote Hybrid Classes by Rotation

A unique new mode described below was created during the pandemic to manage within the reduced room capacities due to the rules of social distancing and still make it possible to hold in-person classes, e.g., 2-week rotation classes:

Class is divided into two groups; each group attends classes in-person and remotely in alternate weeks.

Since this mode was created out of necessity as a temporary measure, it was not expected to be used when “normal” times returned and is no longer available. Therefore, it was not included in this research.

In-Depth Student Interviews

Several detailed, in-depth interviews with a small sample of select students were conducted to identify important considerations used by students in choosing from alternative education delivery systems available.

Using the composite qualitative information from the interviews, a structured questionnaire was developed for investigating larger samples.

The Survey Instrument

Following were the Important Areas of Investigation in the Questionnaire:

1. Relative Importance of Various Learning Activities to Students in Defining, Judging, and Receiving Quality Education
2. Relative Importance of Various Selection Criteria to Students in Choosing Delivery Modes for Different Classes
3. Ratings of Alternative Education Delivery Modes on the Selection Criteria
4. Student Choices of Education Delivery Modes in the Past, Before the Pandemic

5. Students' Likely Choices of Alternative Education Deliver Modes After the Pandemic (i.e., after the experience of being forced to use remote communications during the pandemic)

6. Students' Demographic Information for Classification Purposes

The Pilot Study

To test the questionnaire, it was administered to a small sample of student respondents in a pilot study. The objective of the pilot study was to analyze the findings to improve the instrument itself so as to make it more effective in eliciting the required information. The findings would also serve as indicators of the likely results from large and representative samples of the interest groups.

Additional Details of the Pilot Study

A convenience sample of 100 undergraduate marketing students was used for this pilot study. The survey was conducted at the end of the 2021 Spring Semester. Students were interviewed after completing the questionnaire to get their feedback on the suitability of the instrument used for the survey.

Gender: Male = 67% Female = 33%

Year in Program: Sophomore = 70%, Junior = 21%, Other = 9%

Select Findings of the Pilot Study and Analysis

Table 1

Relative Importance of Various Selection Criteria to Students in Choosing Education Delivery Modes for Different Classes

Criteria	Relative Importance Rating
Quality of Learning	4.7
Mental Energy Spent	4.5
Time Spent	4.3
Cost	4.2
Physical Energy Spent	3.8

Scale: Very Important = 5 4 3 2 1 = Very Unimportant

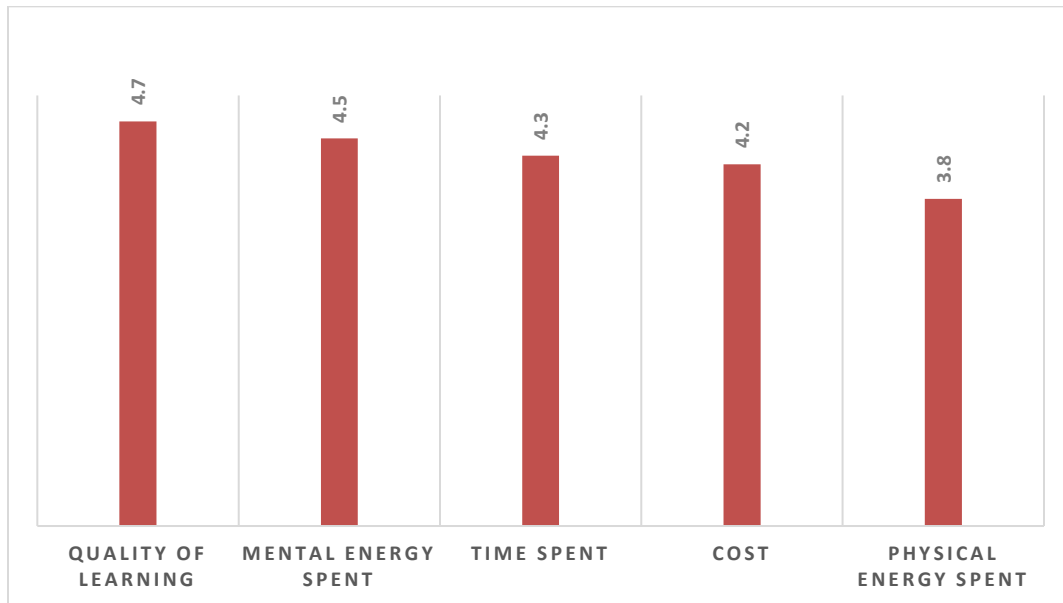


Figure 1. Relative importance of selection criteria in choosing education delivery modes.

Table 2

Student Choices of Alternative Education Delivery Modes in the Past, Before the Pandemic

Education Delivery Mode	Choice Frequency
1. Fully In-Person Classes	4.5
2. Combined In-Person and Remote Hybrid Classes	1.1
3. Fully Remote Synchronous Classes	0.7
4. Fully Remote Asynchronous Classes	1.0

Scale: Very Often = 5 4 3 2 1 = Very Rarely 0 = Never

Table 3

Students Likely Choices of Alternative Education Deliver Modes After the Pandemic

Education Delivery Mode	Choice Frequency
1. Fully In-Person Classes	3.8
2. Combined In-Person and Remote Hybrid Classes	2.1
3. Fully Remote Synchronous Classes	2.5
4. Fully Remote Asynchronous Classes	2.7

Scale: Very Often = 5 4 3 2 1 = Very Rarely 0 = Never

Table 4

Comparing Student Choices of Alternative Education Delivery Modes: Before vs After Pandemic

Education Delivery Mode	Choice Before Pandemic	Choice After Pandemic
1. Fully In-Person Classes	4.5	3.8
2. Combined In-Person and Remote Hybrid Classes	1.1	2.1
3. Fully Remote Synchronous Classes	0.7	2.5
4. Fully Remote Asynchronous Classes	1.0	2.7

Scale: Very Often = 5 4 3 2 1 = Very Rarely 0 = Never

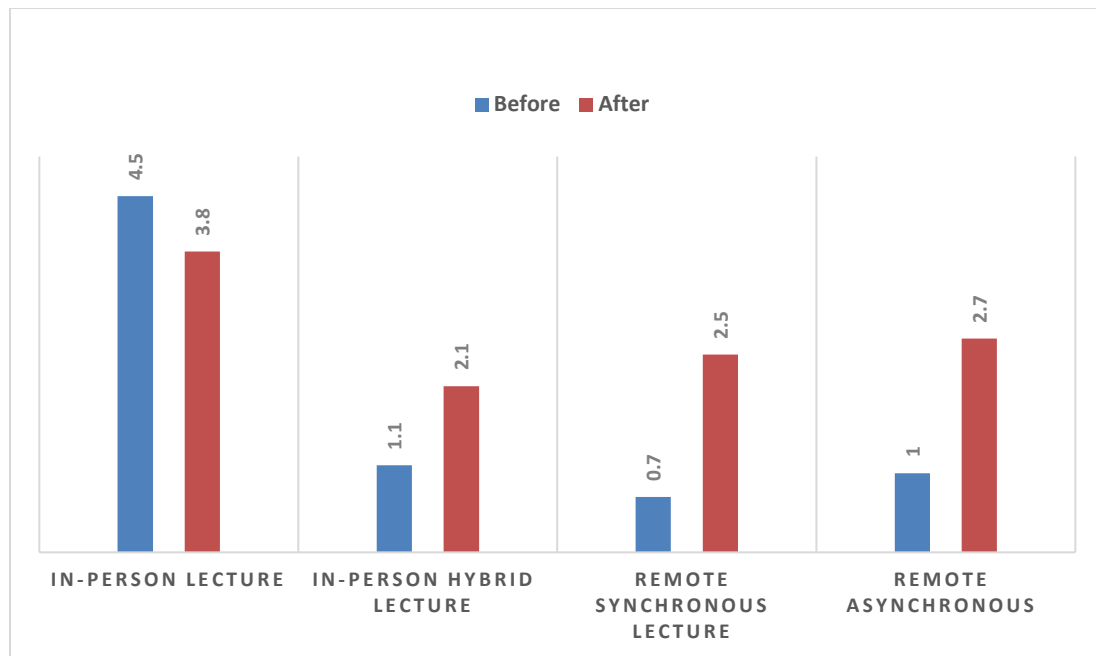


Figure 2. Education delivery mode choices before and after pandemic.

Conclusion

The results of the pilot study show that the forced use of remote communications for education delivery has had an impact on the students' attitudes toward remote learning in a major way. Students are now likely to view all methods of education delivery more positively than they did before the pandemic experience. These results are consistent with the "Theory of Cognitive Dissonance," and the "Theory of Forced Compliance."

However, students continue to view the in-person education delivery mode most favorably, and far more favorably as compared to all other alternative education delivery modes using remote communication technology.

In other words, even though the pandemic experience has made students' attitudes and preferences more favorable than before toward remote learning methods, the "in-person class" mode of education delivery continues to be the most preferred mode of education delivery. It is, therefore, likely that students will continue to choose "in-person classes" whenever possible. However, when other circumstances

make that difficult or impossible, they will now be more willing than before to accept other education delivery modes involving remote communications.

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