

Analyzing the positive impact of Covid19 pandemic on digital media literacy in universities of Central Punjab

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Abstract

This research analyzes the positive effect of Covid19 pandemic on digital media literacy in universities of Central Punjab. The positive side of the pandemic can be discussed by taking into account the theoretical basis of the Uses and Gratification Theory and The Risk Communication framework. During the lockdown imposed to control the spread of COVID19, individuals excessively used digital/ social media platforms to satisfy their needs or to gain contentment. In doing so, individuals satisfied both their Cognitive and Affective needs during the pandemic. Augmentation in terms of Digital media literacy can be termed as a fruitful outcome of the pandemic. Individuals mostly align their written and spoken discourse with the destructive outcomes of the pandemic, but this research work detects the bright side of the pandemic, specifically in terms of augmented digital media literacy among BS-level students and their instructors. The data has been gathered from public sector universities situated in the Central Punjab region of Pakistan. The research work has been aligned with Uses and Gratification Theory and The Risk Communication framework. Population of the study includes both the students and their instructors and it has been discovered as to how the pupils and their teachers have acquainted with knowledge of digital media by engaging themselves in digitalized teaching-learning process and supplementing their digital media literacy. Teachers and students have both enhanced their media literacy by the use of different web-based and social media platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Moodle, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc. One can regard the pandemic as a blessing in disguise on account of the enhanced digital media literacy among tutors and the pupils. This research work is planned to assist and encourage both the tutors and students to explore new ways of learning through which the teaching-learning can be even more accessible, pleasing, digitalized, effective and innovative. The use of digital platforms for imparting information can be helpful in both days of normalcy and crisis as the people are capable of satisfying their needs by incorporating digital media platforms into their learning. All thanks to the pandemic that has taught learning through new options.

Keywords: *Novel Coronavirus, COVID-19, Pandemic, Digital Media Literacy*

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Introduction

The outbreak of Covid19 pandemic initially disturbed the education setup of China and then appeared in Pakistan in the mid of March 2020, resulting in the closure of educational institutions of all levels. (Haider et al., 2021).

The first case of the deadly pandemic Covid19 was reported in the city of Karachi on 26th February, 2020. It then had rapidly spread throughout Pakistan. The pandemic affected more than 6,200 individuals in the first 7 weeks of its appearance in the country. Its emergence initially resulted in more than 111 deaths. (Ilyas, Azuine and Tamiz, 2020)

Covid19 unpleasantly traumatised not only the societal and economic sides of life but it also adversely affected the education sector of the country. Novel Coronavirus has disturbed the normal operations of several activities across the globe, including education and learning (Baber, 2020). The Government of Pakistan, as part of the nationwide lockdown ordered closure of all schools in March, 2020. This prompted Pakistan's Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training to adopt substitutes for the continuity of learning and education. ("COVID-19 spurs big changes in Pakistan's education," 2021).

Immediate closure of schools, colleges and universities was made in order to lower the risk of pandemic's spread. In this regard, the government of Pakistan had to order closure of educational institutions as cases of COVID-19 increased across the country. This closure of educational institutions had prompted chief disruption in the educational system of the country as none was prepared to deal with it so instantly.

As an alternative, the education sector had to right away shift from traditional mode of physical classroom-based learning to online mode of learning in order to continue uninterruptedly with the impart of teaching and learning. Although this situation did look somewhat grim and unpleasant at first but there did appear to be a light noticeable at the end of the murky tunnel, cheers to the Corona pandemic

Higher education is among the areas that have been affected by the pandemic. The worldwide change towards distance education on account of the outbreak of Covid19 pandemic is what none can deny. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, several studies have been carried out globally to inspect not merely universities' responses to the present state, but also to study its impact on teachers and students. Most of the studies focused centrally on the quality of life for students during prevalence of a pandemic, the system of online education itself, and the pandemic's outcome on the student mobility and the condition of institutes of higher education (Nurovic, 2020).

An emergency or crisis does come up with an opportunity. For those who ponder can learn by digging out something constructive even out of crisis. Covid19 is a pandemic that has taught us lessons by letting us know what we had never even bothered to think of learning. One such example of learning or literacy could be that of digital media. Covid-19 has certainly made a big difference in a way that it has transformed our education sector in seemingly no time or in a short span of time. It has changed our ways of thinking, learning and communicating.

Teachers and students who had always been reluctant to accepting new and innovative ways of teaching-learning through digital media utilities have now started to think differently. With the advent of the pandemic, cognizance of media is gaining central importance more than ever before.

Before the prevalence of Corona virus, there used to be a hesitancy among both the tutors and students whether or not to adopt innovative or digital ways of teaching and learning. Abandoning the traditional mode of face-to-face classroom or physical learning seemed nearly impossible to them but Covid19 has now made it possible for them to enhance their literacy of media by getting to know how to manage classes efficiently through various web-based platforms like Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, etc. It is hence truly said that necessity is the mother of invention.

Objectives

- To determine the positive impact of the Corona pandemic through its linkage with The Uses and Gratification Theory.
- To ascertain the value of augmented and easy correspondence between tutors and students during the pandemic in connection with the Risk Communication framework.
- To analyze as to how Digital Media literacy has increased among students and teachers from universities of Pakistan's Central Punjab region.

The Rationale/ Justification

Augmented use of digital media technologies during the pandemic and even in the post-pandemic world can possibly be on account of gratifying one's most pressing needs. The Uses and Gratification Theory & Risk Communication can serve as the best models to determine the needs and desires of the learners and tutors during the pandemic. Shifting to online mode of imparting education was the only solution for both the teachers and students. The survival of teaching-learning process could not have been possible without transition from physical face to face instruction to online lecture delivery.

Cognitive Needs

Teachers and students have enhanced their digital media literacy. They have hence acquired information and knowledge of not only their domain/field but have also learnt about various digital media platforms, which is something really productive for their present and the future needs.

Affective Needs

The individuals used Digital Media platforms during the pandemic in order to please themselves, to gain pleasure and to satisfy their emotional wants. Moreover, individuals have used these platforms to gain something constructive such as using YouTube to watch lectures and get information plus entertainment at the same time.

Literature Review

Media literacy can be defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms. (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993, p. 7). The significance of digital media literacy relative to political and civic life can be multitudinous. Most essentially, perhaps, digital media literacy can be viewed as a means linked with the promotion of online forms of both civic as well as political engagement. In fact, digital media technologies are now seen as a vital constituent of political and shared interactions of individuals, particularly for youngsters (Kahne et al., 2012).

Media Literacy can be discussed as a set of capabilities that are relevant to media utilization and its creation that an individual can acquire. The concept of Digital media literacy goes beyond the traditional concept of comprehending media literacy by the inclusion of innovative skills pertinent to the current media environment. It further also involves creative teaching and

production as to how the information can be used and evaluated in a critical manner. (Buckingham, 2003; Jenkins, 2006).

Augmented digital media literacy among tutors and learners can directly be associated with the uses and gratification theory, which asserts that the use of media by individuals is perhaps a tool to attain satisfaction and happiness. Individuals want to attain education and hence are interested in being well-informed in order to satisfy their various needs. Satisficing such wants can too be an instrument to escape from the stresses of one's routine life.

Risk Communication

In respect of emergencies linked with public health, risk communication can comprise of a variety of communication capabilities that are needed by means of the readiness, response and recovery periods of grave public health event so as to embolden timely decision making, constructive changes in behaviours and the up keeping of trust.

Risk communication can fundamentally be taken as the spread of such information to the masses that is pertinent to health risks and situations like disease outbreaks and guidelines as to how the attitudes can be changed in order to diminish those hazards or risks. Such thinking has evolved drastically serving as an evidence for social sciences. In this regard, newness has also been witnessed and evolved in practices and technologies of communication and media in the 21st century. (Risk Communication, n.d.)

The Pandemic And Confinement To Homes

Surviving the pandemic, Covid19 has confined the individuals to their companions at home and to their electronic gadgets, whereas the whole world fights the pandemic as a common enemy and as a common goal. Luckily, the pandemic did bring some constructive transformations and changes into the lives of the individuals as well as the nations all together. Despite having drawbacks and devastations, the pandemic serves by helping the nation and the globe in different ways (Sharma, 2021).

Universal Literacy & Media Literacy Competencies

The integration of technology by teachers into their pedagogical and evaluation practices and the incorporation of digital content into the traditional teaching process has certainly encouraged and accelerated learning by innovative means. The world witnessed as to how Digital literacy competencies augmented during the pandemic. One can regard Covid19 pandemic as a blessing in disguise as individuals, for the first time ever, got the chance to acquaint themselves largely with media literacy. Earlier, teaching-learning was mostly confined to the traditional classroom or face to face learning. Tutors and learners were both reluctant in teaching and learning through innovative ways.

Digital literacy is taken as a set of fundamental digital skills that are required for one's engagement with life in a digital world. It is based more on the augmented reliance of office work on digital technologies. This model can be linked with information literacy. Universal literacy model attentions on such basic digital skills that are essential in allowing an individual to entirely participate in digital culture either as a worker or as a citizen. (Jones, 2016b)

Interventions in terms of media literacy must be planned so as to meet the individualistic needs of different ages by keeping in view the roles and aims that those individuals may possibly come across in their lifetime. In this regard, different instructive methodologies are needed to efficiently address the media literacy capabilities or competencies of young children, teenagers,

parents among other adults. This education or media literacy will assist the old aged people in their cognitive-functioning apart from them establishing social relationships and assisting people in assessing health-linked services and data. (Rasi et al., 2019).

Effective and Efficient Use of Communication Technologies

The use of digital media is increasing across the globe and similar trend can be witnessed in Pakistan too. The use of digital media specifically in relation to the higher education sector is witnessing growth and the need for digitized contents too is mounting. (Rafiq and Ameen, 2012) Communication through any medium certainly needs efficiency as well as effectiveness. In this regard, one can term effective communication as being the most significant life skill of all. Vivid and succinct messages from the speaker through any means including digital media platforms can certainly help the receiver in not only rightly comprehending the message but also in responding to that message effectively. Effective and efficient use of digital media can create a sense of mutual understanding amongst individuals and groups.

Media literacy is concerned with the association among the elements of competence, textuality, and power. It is highly important that we as a society are in a position to not only find but also to ensure facilitation in terms of acquiring those tasks and abilities that are needed by the population in general to use today's information and communication technologies in an effective and safe manner. (Scheibe & Rogow, 2014)

Transformation Of Learning And Workplace

The COVID19 pandemic has transformed the world in both the areas of learning and work. Distance learning, interruption from normal routine, involuntary rest, and an involuntary home office have all brought with them for us new challenges. Many people were bound to familiarize themselves with the new situation. As far as the education sector is concerned, learning classrooms altered and shifted to online or virtual classrooms. Furthermore, challenges like insufficient digital infrastructure and inadequate digital learning materials did occur. However, as the approval and fame of online education continues to augment, it is direly needed to comprehend as to how the learning experience can further be improved and made smooth for the learners in virtual and videocentric environments. The fast development of digital media and related digital technologies, in addition to the shortcomings that are caused by the pandemic Covid19 makes it hard to perceive all this stuff. Online teaching and learning in itself is a totally different condition when compared with the customary form of teaching practices. However, this pandemic has altered the plans of many individuals in terms of work and learning. In such a situation, the process of adapting the new mode of teaching, learning or working seems challenging (Bak & Administra-, 2020).

Methodology

Research comprises "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications." It is used to establish or confirm facts, reaffirm the results of previous work, solve new or existing problems, support theorems, or develop new theories. A research project may also be an expansion on past work in the field.

The researcher has linked the topic with the essential components of The Risk Communication Framework and The Uses and Gratifications theory which affirms that people use media to please or satisfy their specific wants and needs. Likewise is the case with the use of

technology or augmented digital media literacy for teaching-learning as far as the context of Covid19 is concerned.

The researcher has implied the quantitative research paradigm for the purpose of data collection and analysis. In this regard, questionnaire has been taken as major data collection tool. For systematic measurement of data, the best suited method is the quantitative method of research. It is a method of research that is numerical and statistical in nature. Hence quantitative research method has been implied as an adequate method for data collection.

Population of the study includes both the students and their instructors and it has been ascertained as to how the pupils and their teachers have both been acquainted with digital media by engaging themselves in online teaching-learning process and augmenting their digital media literacy through different web-based and social media platforms. All such is on account of the pandemic and closure of educational institutions. Convenience sampling has been implied as method of sampling in this regard. The respondents were selected from the following universities of Central Punjab through Convenience sampling:

1. University of Okara
2. University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Okara Campus
3. University of Sahiwal
4. NCBA&E Lahore
5. University of Faisalabad
6. Riphah International University

Results and Discussion

This research explores the positive ramifications or impact of Covid19 pandemic in terms of enhanced digital media literacy in the country. Current research identifies the positive or the bright aspect of the pandemic Covid19 particularly in connection with the augmented digital media literacy at various universities of Pakistan's Central Punjab region.

For collection of data, a close-ended questionnaire was designed and the respondents were to respond of their opinion in accordance with the Likert scale showing distinct 5-points including:

SA- Strongly Agree

A-Agree

UD-Undecided

DA- Disagree

SD- Strongly Disagree

SA A UD DA SD

The Questions and responses of the research participants are as follows:

Covid19 has boosted our digital media literacy.

Table 1: Responses to Q1

| Q1 | SA | A | UD | DA | SD |
|-----------------|----|------|-----|----|----|
| Response | 33 | 26.5 | 9.5 | 19 | 12 |

Out of the entire population, 33% respondents strongly agree with the notion that the pandemic has enhanced their digital media literacy. Another 26.5% are those who simply agree with it. A small proportion of 9.5% is undecided on it. 19% simply disagreed with the statement. Moreover, 12% is of those who think otherwise by strongly disagreeing with the notion.

Covid19 pandemic has furthered digital communication in relation to teaching and learning.

Table 2: Responses to Q2

| Q2 | SA | A | UD | DA | SD |
|-----------------|------|----|----|------|----|
| Response | 42.5 | 31 | 6 | 11.5 | 9 |

As far as the second question is concerned, 42.5% out of 100 percent respondents strongly agree with the notion that Covid19 pandemic has boosted the rate of digital communication for teaching and learning. Another 31% are those who simply agree with it. A small proportion of 6% is undecided on it. 11.5% simply disagreed with the statement. Moreover, 9% is of those who think otherwise by strongly disagreeing with the notion.

Corona virus has drastically digitized the ways of communication (in a short span of time).

Table 3: Responses to Q3

| Q3 | SA | A | UD | DA | SD |
|-----------------|----|------|-----|----|----|
| Response | 29 | 35.5 | 3.5 | 18 | 14 |

As far as the responses to the third question are concerned, 29% respondents strongly agree with the notion that Corona virus has digitized the ways of communication in a short span of time. Another 35.5% are those who simply agree with it. A small proportion of 3.5% is undecided on it. 18% simply disagreed with the statement. Moreover, 14% is of those who think otherwise by strongly disagreeing with the notion regarding digitized ways of communication in a limited time period.

The pandemic has made correspondence between tutors and students even more easy, accessible and digital.

Table 4: Responses to Q4

| Q4 | SA | A | UD | DA | SD |
|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Response | 46 | 33 | 0 | 19 | 02 |

As far as the fourth question is concerned, 46% out of 100 percent respondents strongly agree with the notion that the pandemic has made correspondence between tutors and students even more easy, accessible and digital. Another 33% are those who simply agree with it. None is undecided on

it. 19% simply disagreed with the statement. Moreover, merely 2% is of those who think otherwise by strongly disagreeing with the notion.

Imparting education (teaching-learning) through digital media can be the best alternative to face-to-face classes in times of crisis.

Table 5: *Responses to Q5*

| Q5 | SA | A | UD | DA | SD |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Response | 36.5 | 39 | 4 | 11.5 | 9 |

As far as the responses to the fifth question are concerned, 36.5% respondents strongly agree with the notion that the process of teaching-learning through digital media can be the best alternative to face-to-face classes in times of crisis. Another 39% are those who simply agree with the fifth question. A small proportion of 4% is undecided on it. 11.5% simply disagreed with the statement. Moreover, 9% is of those who think otherwise by strongly disagreeing with the notion of the fifth question.

Digital Media literacy can equally be useful in post-pandemic world too.

Table 6: *Responses to Q6*

| Q6 | SA | A | UD | DA | SD |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Response | 19 | 36 | 20.5 | 13 | 11.5 |

Out of 100% respondents, only 19% out of 100 percent respondents strongly agree with the notion that Digital Media literacy can equally be useful in post-pandemic world too. Another 36% are those who simply agree with it. A significant proportion of 20.5% is undecided and confused on it. 13% simply disagreed with the statement. Moreover, 11.5% is of those who think otherwise by strongly disagreeing with the notion.

Covid19 pandemic has eliminated our hesitancy to learn/teach through digital media platforms.

Table 7: *Responses to Q7*

| Q7 | SA | A | UD | DA | SD |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Response | 53.5 | 39 | 0 | 4 | 3.5 |

As far as seventh question is concerned, out of a total 100% respondents, a major share of 53.5% respondents strongly agrees with the notion that Covid19 pandemic has eliminated their hesitancy to either learn or teach through digital media platforms. Another 39% are those who simply agree with it. None was undecided or confused on it. Only 4% simply disagreed with the statement. Moreover, 3.5% is of those who think otherwise by strongly disagreeing with the notion.

Augmented digital media literacy is necessary for teachers and students to make our country stand at par with the modern world.

Table 8: Responses to Q8

| Q8 | SA | A | UD | DA | SD |
|----------|----|----|-----|------|----|
| Response | 39 | 35 | 8.5 | 13.5 | 4 |

Out of 100% respondents, 39% out of 100 percent respondents strongly agree with the notion that augmented digital media literacy is necessary for teachers and students to make our country stand at par with the modern world. Another 35% are those who simply agree with it. A proportion of 8.5% is undecided on it. 13.5% simply disagreed with the statement. Moreover only 4% is of those who think otherwise by strongly disagreeing with the notion.

Contribution for further research and its broad significance

This study will promote the augmentation of digital media literacy in the country and will make our country stand at par with the developed nations if there is readiness among tutors and learners to incorporate modern practices into their teaching-learning.

Discussion

Plato had rightly said in the Socratic dialogue 'Republic' that our need will be the real creator. In other words, necessity is the mother of invention. Augmented digital media literacy in Pakistan is truly the fruit of Novel Coronavirus.

Communication carried out during prevalence of a crisis or pandemic certainly has a pivotal role to play. In this regard, we can associate teaching-learning done during the pandemic with the Framework of Risk Communication. Educational institutions specifically of higher education level such as the colleges and the universities have greatly been impacted by the pandemic Covid19.

The sudden shift from conventional teaching practices to the digitized mode of imparting education is irrefutable. It, however, does have significance of its own as it has enhanced digital media literacy of both the teachers and the students alike. The pandemic has satisfied our wishes too and at the same time, we have learnt new and easy ways of correspondence during crisis. This is what the Uses and Gratification Theory argues.

Conclusion

Innovation is the need of the hour. Findings prove that the individuals now are more attached with technology for education and they think more critically than ever before. Their digital media literacy has certainly increased over the course of the pandemic. Interestingly, the pandemic has made correspondence between tutors and students even easier, accessible and digital. There used to be a reluctance among those associated with teaching-learning profession regarding the use digital media platforms for educational practices. This hesitancy has luckily almost come to an end which is indeed a blessing for Pakistan. We may say that digital media literacy is necessary for teachers and students to make Pakistan stand at par with the modern world having numerous challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, the pandemic has greatly boosted digital media literacy among the teachers and the students of BS Level at universities situated in Central Punjab region of Pakistan. We can hence regard the pandemic as a blessing in disguise in terms of digital media literacy.

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