



## 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 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 the 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. And 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.*

### INTRODUCTION

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

While we all are hoping that life will get back to “normal” soon, there is a concern that the new normal may be quite different from the old normal we were used to. The pandemic forced us into alternative modes of education delivery with an intensity and urgency that many of us had not experienced before. Need for social distancing in classrooms and 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 the 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, covering the first phase of a two-phase research project, will present the important facets of education delivery systems identified, and the survey instrument developed to assess 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.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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

Festinger's (Festinger 1957; Wixon and Laird 1976) cognitive dissonance theory suggested that people have a psychological need and drive to keep the three components of our knowledge (cognition), attitudes (subjective feelings), and behavior (actions) consistent with another to keep mental harmony. This is known as the principle of cognitive consistency (McLeod 2018).

Any inconsistency between knowledge, attitudes, and/or behavior causes a feeling of intense mental discomfort uncomfortable described as cognitive dissonance or simply dissonance. And, such dissonance drives people to change one or more of the three components to bring them back in harmony. The Forced Compliance Theory, a corollary of the theory, (Festinger and Carlsmith 1959) suggested 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.

Another well-known phenomenon illustrating this theory is the "Stockholm Syndrome," feelings of trust or affection felt in many cases of kidnapping or hostage-taking by a victim toward a captor (Kuleshnyk 1984, Internet). The **name** of the **syndrome** is derived from a botched bank robbery in **Stockholm**, Sweden. In August 1973 four employees of Sveriges Kreditbank were held hostage in the bank's vault for six days. During the standoff, a seemingly incongruous bond developed between captive and captor.

## ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION DELIVERY MODES

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 Lecture Classes

= Fully in-person classes, all students attend all classes together

### 2. Fully In-Person Fully Hybrid Lecture Classes

= all students attend together in-person, but only alternate class meetings are held in-person

Thus, all students attend only half the class meetings together in-person and work remotely during the remaining class meetings

### 3. Fully Remote Synchronous Lecture Classes

= Fully Online Synchronous Lectures

### 4. Fully Remote Asynchronous Classes

= No live lectures, Fully Online Asynchronous Teaching through textbook, notes, documents, and videos

\* A new mode described below was created during the pandemic to meet the need for social distancing resulting in reduced room capacity still be able to hold in-person classes within.

Lecture Classes, In-Person Hybrid by Rotation



= e.g. 2-week rotation classes, Class divided in 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 is not expected to be used when “normal” times return. Therefore, it was not included in this research.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The principal objective of this two-phase research project was to investigate whether the forced use of remote communication methods during the pandemic has changed the attitudes and preferences of students and teachers (the latter group is not covered in this paper) toward various education delivery modes.

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

1. Identify students' important educational goals which they use as criteria in choosing education delivery modes
2. Explore student preferences and choices of alternative delivery modes before the pandemic
3. Measure students' attitudes (indicative of their future choices) toward various delivery methods after the experience of being forced to use remote communications during the pandemic.
4. Demographic information of respondents for classification purposes

## Design of the Study

The first phase study involved conducting detailed in-depth interviews of a small sample of select students to identify important considerations used by students in choosing from various education delivery alternatives.

Using the composite qualitative information so generated, the second phase of the study developed an objective questionnaire for investigating larger samples.

To test the instrument was administered to a samples of student respondents in a pilot study and the findings analyzed for improving the instrument itself to make it more effective in eliciting the required information. The findings also serve as indicators of the



likely results from large and representative samples of the interest groups in the second phase of the research.

### The Survey Instrument

Following are the Important Areas of Investigation in the Questionnaire:

1. Relative Importance of various Learning Activities
2. Relative Importance of various Learning Objectives used as the Criteria in selecting delivery modes
3. Ratings of alternative education delivery modes on each of the selection criteria
4. Actual choices of alternative education delivery modes by students in the past before the pandemic
5. Likely choices of alternative education delivery modes by students in future after the experience of being forced to use remote communications during in the pandemic

### 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 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%

### Results and Analysis

- Relative Importance of Selection Criteria for Education Delivery Method  
Very Important = 5    4    3    2    1 = Very Unimportant

Quality of Learning	4.7
Mental Energy Spent	4.5
Time Spent	4.3
Cost	4.2
Physical Energy Spent	3.8



● Choices of Delivery Modes before the Pandemic

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

In-Person Lecture	4.5
In-Person Hybrid Lecture	1.1
Remote Synchronous Lecture	0.7
Remote Asynchronous	1.0

● Likely Choices of Delivery Mode after the Pandemic

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

In-Person Lecture	3.8
In-Person Hybrid Lecture	2.1
Remote Synchronous Lecture	2.5
Remote Asynchronous	2.7

Comparing Choice of Delivery Mode: Before vs After Pandemic

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

Delivery Mode	Choice Before Pandemic	Choice After Pandemic
In-Person Lecture	4.5	3.8
In-Person Hybrid Lecture	1.1	2.1
Remote Synchronous Lecture	0.7	2.5
Remote Asynchronous	1.0	2.7

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 lecture method of education delivery most, and far more favorably compared to all other modes using remote learning technology.

In other words, even though the pandemic experience has made students' attitudes and preferences more favorable than before toward remote learning methods, "in-person



lecture” 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 lectures” whenever possible. However, when other circumstances make that impossible, they will now be more willing than before to accept delivery modes involving remote learning.

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