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Towards a Brave New World

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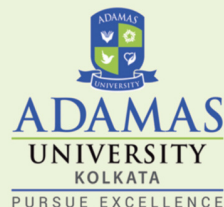
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Education



Towards a Brave New World



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From the Desk of the Executive Editor

Prof. Ujjwal K Chowdhury

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From the Desk of the Managing Editor

Dear Readers,

In dull, dreary moments (stolen between breaths that never quite fill your lungs), I often wonder why we look forward to anything at all – disappointment curls deep in my belly, sits heavy in my ribs, echoes in the stutter that follows. Why? There is always an undercurrent of unreality; there is always a pipe dream, a utopia, a lull – it's an uphill battle, a sinking ship, but the uncertainty hardly deters us (between the teeth of being and non-being, of life and death, of love and abandonment, of success and failure, of being and having). We'll always hope. It's woven into the fabric of our history, our social construct; a stifled whisper, a promise that mankind is capable of solidarity, of agency, of compassion, of acceptance.

A promise that time passes (a little morbid, a little bitter) and so does the worst of it all. Perhaps our fickle memory will serve us best now (even so, I feel a pang of dread. What if I've forgotten the most important thing? What if somewhere inside me there is a dark limbo where all the truly important memories are heaped and slowly turning into mud?). We don't have to remember what the tragedies' face morphed into, what her hair is like, what her bony-fingers evolved into; don't have to imagine her black and blue, the colour of the sea every 4 o'clock; rolling in with the tides in a body bag with no words, no secrets, no face. We barrelled through space with no sense of direction, but we've made it out; and now the memory feels like ice in our palm.



And perhaps the very act of existing, of moving on, of living is hope.

2021 is new in every sense of the word – a new wound, a new world, a new hope. It's raw, open, tender, a fish being filleted on the butcher's block. It's honest, young, bursting at the seams with infinite realities; Schrodinger's cat trapped in the box. We're tip-toeing the edge of tomorrow, already. We have the comfort of vaccines now, the luxury of dreaming about

meeting our loved ones again, the muse of a better tomorrow, the curiosity of a future, the hope of living, the simmering fantasy of starting where we left off. There is gratitude regardless – measured breaths, trembling lips, wise smiles, fingertips charred – there is gratitude for life, for reconnecting with our loved ones and learning the volatility of time. There is gratitude for today, tomorrow and perhaps, in time, for yesterday.

At our worst, we are filled with the most hope (and it's our miracle). We often look to segregate, label, categorise – divide and conquer, they say, after all – but in the theatre of life, these wounds are ours to wear, ours to sport, ours to internalise. #IdeaPlus brings to you the way back to the future, and I hope it finds you healing. I hope this new reality is a little kinder, a little warmer. I hope we can learn, unlearn and relearn – I hope knowledge can fill in the gaps, I hope education can revolutionise, and I hope people never stop dreaming.

Prof. (Dr.) Deependra Kumar Jha,
Vice Chancellor, Adamas University
Former Vice Chancellor, UPES, Dehradun
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Managing Higher Education Post Covid-19: An Approach Note



Seasoned educationist
Prof. Ujjwal K Chowdhury
explores the ways to
manage higher education
after the pandemic
subsides.

This article is expected to contribute to the building of institutional resilience for academic planning and continuity post pandemic as we go ahead with the academic year 2021-22. It is also

important to ensure that the WHO advisories, ICMR guidelines, the Central and State Government regulations, the Ministry of Education, Government of India guidelines/ regulations, and the guidelines/ regulations of the UGC and other regulatory bodies are duly adhered to at all times and that they supersede any other recommendation made here or elsewhere.

Challenges of Pandemic in Higher Education

Recent figures released by the UNESCO indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected almost 1.37 billion students across the world. This comprises 90 per

cent of all the enrolled students in around 138 countries. Almost 300 million of these are Indian students, of whom close to 52 per cent could not be reached through any digital learning means due to lack of connectivity or digital access of these unfortunate learners. Apart from half the students not being in digital education in 2020, in the Indian higher education institutions (HEIs), the crisis has impacted new admissions,

There are approximately 394 universities located in rural areas in India. Several million students hail from remote, rural areas with minimal access to electronic devices, reliable internet connectivity, or stable electricity supply resulting in a digital divide.



examinations, student internships, placements and student mobility. Going ahead, an effective strategy is necessary to minimise the adverse impact of the pandemic. Towards this goal, the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) has undertaken several initiatives to support the member universities to minimise the impact of Covid-19. These include online faculty development training

programmes for online teaching, national and international webinars, leadership talks and online workshops on themes such as assessment and evaluation and fostering social responsibility among others. An online survey of HEIs is also being conducted to gauge the preparedness of Indian HEIs for online teaching. India has over 51,000 HEIs (993 universities, 39,931 colleges and 10,725

stand-alone institutes), many of whom were already constrained with the large student population, low student-teacher ratio, diverse demographics and distinct rural-urban divide. The pandemic related challenges add additional layers of complexity. There are approximately 394 universities located in rural areas in India. Several million students hail from remote and rural areas with minimal access to electronic devices, reliable internet connectivity or stable

We will need to build Academic Continuity Plans (ACPs) to suit the breadth of diversity. Unfortunately, the GER across Indian HEIs currently stands at 26.3%.



electricity supply resulting in a sharp digital divide. This means that Indian institutions need to go one step beyond online classrooms to build strong institutional capacity to maximize outreach.

A large proportion of the HEIs are privately managed. The financial implications of the pandemic may be severe for them as they are self-funded and depend on student tuition fees, which in turn

may be constrained in itself. Therefore, the government and the regulators may consider extending their support to private HEIs as well. We shall need to build Academic Continuity Plans (ACPs) to suit the breadth of diversity. Unfortunately, the GER across Indian HEIs currently stands at 26.3 per cent. Distance enrolment is about 10.62 per cent of the total enrolment. Moving ahead, distance



enrolment has to be considered a viable and widely accepted mode of learning. Even while dealing with the consequences of this pandemic on the ongoing education of the current students, HEIs still need to consider the challenges of resources associated with expanding Indian Higher Education to increase the GER in medium to long run. Also, statistics on HEIs show that more than 50

per cent of the total students enrolled are from scheduled castes/tribes, OBC and minority communities, and thus a large number of students represented by these communities may potentially be more vulnerable to additional disadvantages in continuing their education during these pressing times. Given that 394 universities and 60.53 per cent of colleges are located in rural areas, there may

not be sufficient infrastructure in terms of technology (hardware and software), connectivity, continued power and other resources required to effectively implement online classrooms. In addition to this, their homes (especially in non-metro, non-tier-1 cities) may not be well-equipped to conduct synchronous, online classes.

Pedagogical Challenges and Possibilities

A lot of the classroom teaching is dependent on various formats and

Resuming physical operations will require additional setup, infrastructure and protocols for managing the norms of social distancing and sanitization.



pedagogies such as laboratories for STEM courses, workshops for language studies, legal clinics and field visits for law subjects, studio-based work for media, arts, architecture and field visits for social sciences, arts and humanities. These may not be effectively implemented in online formats and will require innovation in teaching and learning methodologies as well as investment in technology-based platforms.

Not having students face to face within the confinement of a physical classroom may hinder the interaction between students and teachers. Even within the online format, students usually are required to keep the cameras off due to bandwidth constraints, making it challenging for the faculty members to understand the receptiveness of students. Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra,

Tamil Nadu and Gujarat are among the states with the most number of Covid-19 cases as on date. This implies that a large number of HEIs, by the virtue of their geography, have high risk of exposure and therefore may not be able to reopen

The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) has undertaken several initiatives to support the member universities to minimise the impact of Covid-19.

The learner of today learns within and beyond the classroom; learns physically, digitally and experientially; learns from mentors, professionals, peers and through his own experiences.

campuses even partially. Additionally, even in other locations, an HEI may be limited by being in a red or containment zone, or may enter that zone after reopening. Resuming physical operations will require

additional setup, infrastructure and protocols for managing the norms of social distancing and sanitization. This would require additional classes to be conducted with lesser students, high-frequency sanitization of all areas, additional staff to manage housekeeping, implementation of hands-free infrastructure such as sanitizer machines etc. It will also need additional protocols to be followed, the monitoring of which may not be feasible at all times.

Academic Continuity Planning

Given the physical restrictions posed by Covid-19, especially when lockdown is imposed in various regions, using technology and the internet to ensure continuity of classes has been a widely utilized mode of operation for various HEIs. It not only allows the continuity of classes but also minimizes the risk of exposure



The present crisis presents an opportunity to reconsider the role of student and teacher in the teaching-learning process and move away from teacher-centric to student-centric pedagogies.

given the high rate of transmission of the coronavirus. Academic continuity planning hence needs theoretical courses (only course readings and classroom lectures with no associated field or lab work) to be done online, through asynchronous learning and synchronous virtual sessions. Same can be for courses run in seminar mode (mostly in Ph.D.). Rest all can be encouraged to be done offline, on campus, face to face, with precautions – practicums, hands-on

workshops, and internships (internal and external), courses including laboratory experiments (primarily in sciences, engineering, medicine), Moot Courts (for law schools), courses involving field work, studio courses (e.g. in architecture, design, media, films, etc), and clinical courses (like legal aid or psychological clinics). This may also require course customization to the mode of delivery, and some courses may require alternative planning needing

deferment of a course or getting a suitable technology to deliver it. Furthermore, instead of delivering a lecture, the course instructors need to focus on using flipped classrooms. In this approach, the faculty member can assign the theoretical component as pre-reads for the classes and utilize the classroom time for practical applications including discussions on real-life case-studies, solving numerical problems, or any other practical component associated with the





course. The faculty member should aggregate learning resources from her/ his own proprietary content and also from open source digital content. There can be nuanced approaches for different categories of students – Category 1 – Self-motivated students who can remain highly engaged, and have the desired infrastructure; Category 2 – Self-motivated students who can remain highly engaged, however, do not have the desired infrastructure; Category

3 – Students with average interest in regular classes due to their inhibitions, however motivated to engage in online classes due to lesser social anxiety and more engaging multimedia content; Category 4 – Students with low interest in general. Based on this analysis, the faculty members may now choose the way to customize the content, use creative means to engage students and most importantly decide the delivery methodology required to

deliver the content. All forms of engagement are to be blended now – asynchronous self-learning based on learning techniques, synchronous digitally and physically, hybrid, social media, discussion boards and the likes. The faculty members can utilize social media platforms including WhatsApp or Facebook to create course specific groups and use these for engaging students in asynchronous discussions related to the course. Also, course customization can

The student as someone who studies from teachers, in the classroom, within the structured syllabus, and works towards getting marks and grades: is also an old concept today.

continue in many ways. Use of short length pre-reading materials and more engaging digital content (including videos, podcasts, audio books etc.) that students can consume under constrained conditions will prove useful. Faculty members can utilize the highlight feature of PDF readers or mobile applications (like Pocket) to highlight the most relevant text to help students with pre-class readings. Sections of videos or podcasts can be time stamped for relevance to the course.

Teacher-Student to Mentor-Learner Approach

The present crisis presents an opportunity to reconsider the role of student and teacher in the teaching-learning process and move away from teacher-centric to student-centric pedagogies. The student needs to be considered as an active partner in the process, who bears greater responsibility for driving own learning using the diversity of content that is accessible through the internet. The role of the teacher needs to change from active disseminator of content to a facilitator of learning – a person responsible for guiding students to valuable resources, for helping students ask the right questions, clear doubts, and design assessments to help students identify the gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The teacher as sage of the stage, last word on syllabus and evaluations, focusing only on completion of course is a gone paradigm. The new age mentor is an aggregator of knowledge, a facilitator, who introduces structured syllabus but moves on to organic learning based on each learner's inclination. The student as someone who studies from teachers in the classroom and within the structured syllabus and works towards getting marks and grades is also an old concept today. The learner of today learns within and beyond the classroom; learns physically, digitally and experientially; learns from mentors, professionals, peers and through his own

experiences; begins with a structured syllabus but moves on to an organic one based on his interest; and learns for life with exams and grades being part of the journey and not its end.

Part 2 of the Approach Note

We may also look at newer approaches to evaluation and assessment, to social bonding on campus, to internship and placements initiatives, to cultural and sports activities, but all that in second part of this piece, later.

The writer has drawn upon several sources like UGC guidelines, published articles of himself and others in Indian media, Jindal Global University document on post Covid-19 educational tool-kit and his interaction with many leading educationists during recent webinars to develop the content for this article, and thanks them all.

[Author's Introduction: A leading media academic and an internationally acclaimed speaker and writer, Prof. Ujjwal K Chowdhury is currently the Pro Vice Chancellor and the Dean of the School of Media and Communication at the Kolkata-based Adamas University. He has spearheaded some of the finest media institutes in the country and taken them to newer heights. Formerly the Dean of the School of Media at Pearl Academy and the Director of Ramoji Krian Universe (RKU), strategically located within the Ramoji Film City (RFC) in Hyderabad, Prof. Chowdhury has also been a Dean at Symbiosis International (Deemed University) in Pune and Amity University in Mumbai. He also acted as the Dean of Whistling Woods International in Mumbai. Earlier, Prof. Chowdhury has been a Media Advisor with the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India and the World Health Organization (WHO), India. Prof. Chowdhury is widely believed to have introduced the concept of convergence in media education.]

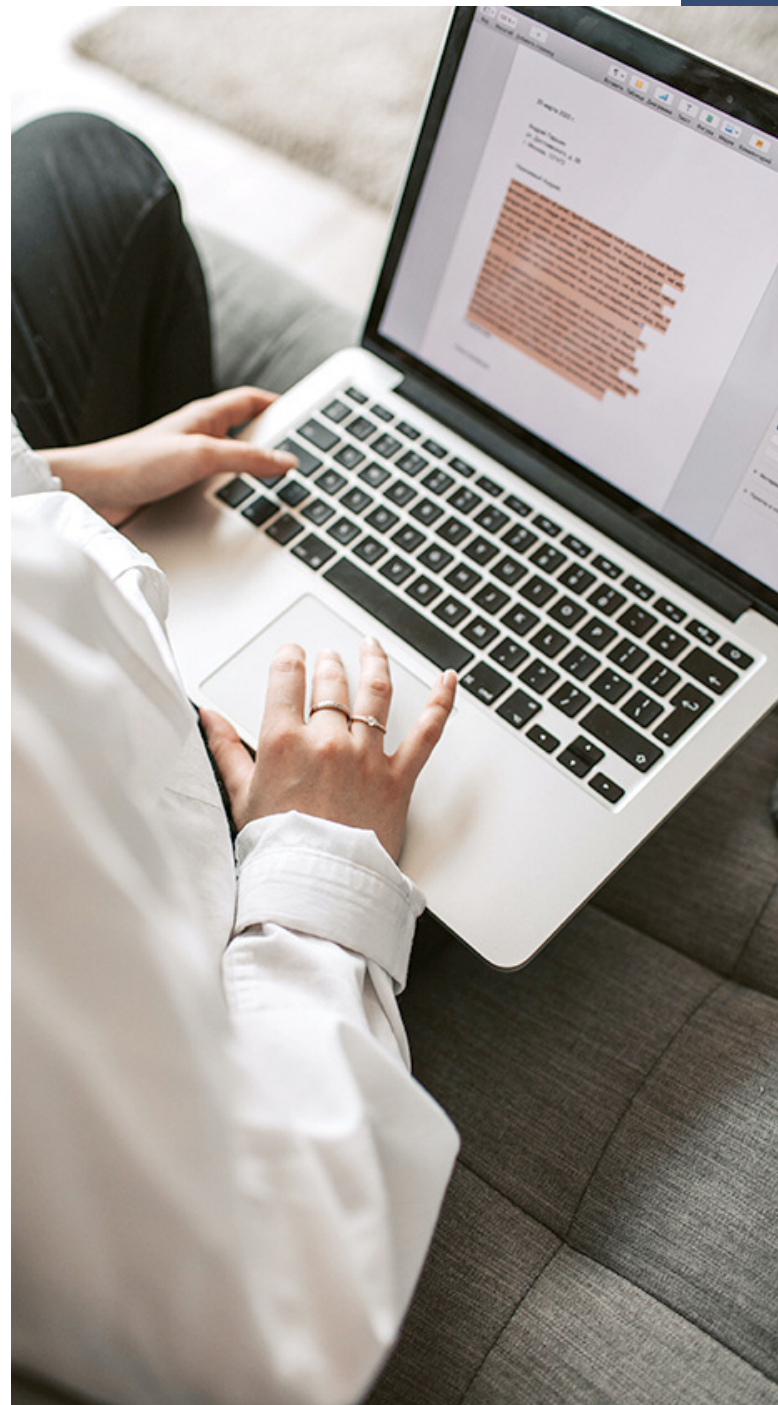


Future of Internationalization of Higher Education in the Post Pandemic Time

*Academic and cultural expert **Najma Lashkarian** deliberates on the key aspects of internationalization of higher education in the post pandemic time.*



Internationalization of higher education can be defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education”, Knight (2008). It can be argued that in the post pandemic time, the basic configuration of internationalization is likely to remain, with global higher education fundamentally stable. But significant short-term and perhaps long-term consequences and disruptions are inevitable – becoming increasingly serious as the crisis continues. And, it would be a fault to overgeneralize the broad landscape of higher education worldwide – with more than thousands of universities and millions of students. Higher education everywhere is segmented and differentiated, with public and private institutions with vastly differing resources and serving different needs. This is true within countries and across borders. Internationalization has emerged as one of the top priorities for higher education institutions around the



world and India is no exception. However, most higher education institutions often do not clearly specify the rationale and conceptualization of their internationalization policies. Thus their efforts frequently lead to changes that are superficial or isolated rather than profound and pervasive. And,

often internationalization efforts may even run counter to institutional identity, which may force higher education institutions to sacrifice quality and integrity for the perception of meeting globalization demands through rudimentary internationalization policies. At this time, Covid-19 has

created a broad-based crisis for higher education globally. Higher education has been disrupted as never before but the fact that campuses are physically closed does not mean that higher education institutions have stopped functioning. On the contrary, faced with multiple challenges, they have had to respond



quickly and find new solutions to previously unknown problems and new ways in which to continue teaching, conduct research and serve society. It is inevitable that students and academic institutions in low-income countries and in less affluent parts of other nations will be especially affected. Undoubtedly,



higher education is certainly and bitterly affected by the Coronavirus. Some commentators have already observed that a number of colleges and universities will likely be forced to close their doors through the coming months. Others have noted that the pandemic has catalyzed the move to online instruction – students and professors are both being forced to use online learning platforms and universities have been making emergency investments in the technology to enable this change. Coronavirus is going to devastate state budgets that will definitely be reflected by a decrease in the portion of finance allocated to higher education. Covid-19 can now be seen as a test of the ability of higher education institutions and their associations to adapt and accelerate the pace of change. But while experiments with enhanced online instruction and the loss of some institutions unable to fill their classrooms may offer opportunities for efficiencies, the most important opportunity that the Coronavirus shock presents is an opportunity to rethink the political economy of the

Internationalization will therefore need to include a greater collaboration, discussion and development with key stakeholders (students, academics and administrative staff, partners, accrediting bodies).

entire higher education system and reshape it to fit the challenges of the internationalization of higher education in the 21st century. We shall need to become better at identifying and navigating our way out of the current complex and ambiguous situation. International strategy will need to be more agile, flexible and future-based than ever before. It is clear that Covid-19 will not be a short-term condition and situation and that this may be a long-term

crisis. Further, much depends on the broader political and economic realities that will emerge from the crisis. Undoubtedly, the global and national economies will take a massive hit. Economic recovery will take time with many arguing that implications will be more serious and it seems impossible that higher education will have a high priority in national recovery plans. The internationalization of higher education is a global phenomenon but with substantial variation in how it is made comprehensive and operational across regions and institutions. The diversity in pathways toward internationalization, even when pursuing common aspirations, is necessary and a strength because higher education institutions differ substantially in size, mission priorities, cultures, and modes of operation. A comprehensive approach to higher education internationalization must fit these diverse institutional and organizational realities. In the post pandemic time,

It can be argued that in the post pandemic time, the basic configuration of internationalization is likely to remain, with global higher education fundamentally stable.

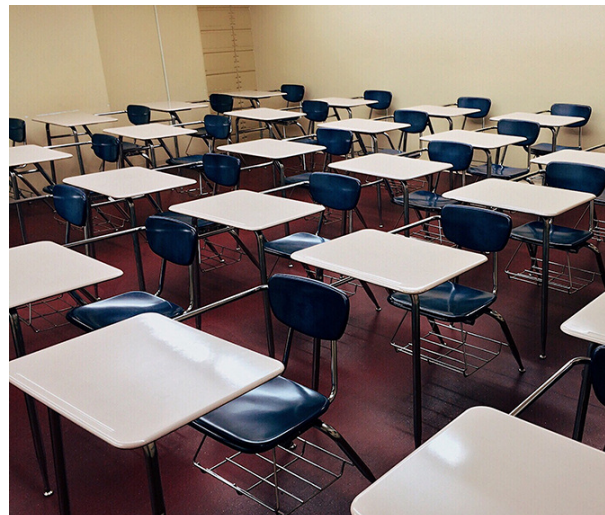
internationalization of higher education should cover key areas grouped into the following categories – international student and staff mobility, the internationalization and improvement of curricula and digital learning and cooperation among institutions whereby resources are pooled and key skills are shared. These categories should not be segregated but be integrated as elements of a comprehensive strategy.



The future of higher education will require to diversify the options in the higher education marketplace by being innovative and flexible. In other words, we need not focus on the increase in number of the incoming students but instead increase apprenticeship programmes and expand the number of fields in which work-based learning can be offered. In addition, there are high-quality certificate programmes in subjects like information technology that could be expanded by providing opportunity to upgrade their skills. The current crisis indicates that strengthening online education contributes to increasing public safety and public health. In this regard, governments should be encouraged to make it more affordable and invest in universities online capacity building, in order to protect the higher education sector in times of social uncertainties and global emergencies. Significant aspects of contemporary higher education depend on globalization – not only student mobility and internationalization initiatives but also collaborative research and increasingly global knowledge networks and other aspects.

While this mandatory move online has taken higher education by surprise, the debate whether online education will become mainstream in higher education or online education will play any major role in the future of higher education is still unclear. In the short term, the question might rather be how to make online education as good and reliable as possible, to maximize the quality of teaching and learning experiences and the level of satisfaction of all users, while it is the only option available for higher education.

In the longer term, when the situation returns to normal, higher education might consider including online education as part of their regular pedagogical offer.



Online education in the post pandemic time will also encourage the development of a global knowledge society, international partnerships, and content sharing and regional collaboration among universities.

Making it mandatory for students to take some courses entirely online, as a few conventional universities are already doing, can be a starting point. For universities, following this path is in line with the prevailing digital culture in our society. The growth of online education over the past decade indicates an increasing structural shift in higher education and not in the sense of a replacement of on-campus education. Whether to achieve blended learning for on-campus students or to offer fully online programmes for distant learners, efforts should be encouraged to identify best practices, integrate new and emerging technologies, stimulate faculty members

Higher education everywhere is segmented and differentiated, with public and private institutions with vastly differing resources and serving different needs.

to be active and more willing to use these tools, turn conventional universities into bimodal institutions and make access to online education more affordable, convenient, and engaging to learners from all walks of life.

Delivering education online has been adopted by almost all universities around the world at different paces. Yet, some challenges are still getting in the way of e-learning in higher education. At universities, these challenges mostly relate to connectivity issues, lack of infrastructure and cost of data, financial costs, regulations, the digital gap, and the cultural leap for teachers. Without pretending to be exhaustive, this list helps explain the reluctance to online higher education at universities around the world – but progress is inevitable and becoming faster. This unprecedented crisis reaffirms that in such difficult times, sharing resources is the only way for the global higher education community to rise to the challenge and proudly claim its fundamental role in the society.

While experiments with enhanced online instruction may offer opportunities for efficiencies, the most important opportunity that the Coronavirus shock presents is an opportunity to rethink the political economy of the entire higher education system, and reshape it to fit the challenges of the 21st century. Online

education in the post pandemic time will also encourage the development of a global knowledge society, international partnerships, and content sharing and regional collaboration among universities. Online teaching and open online interaction channels are conducive to stimulating and cultivating students' autonomy, and encouraging them to develop a sense of ownership and initiative toward their own learning. Although mobility has been the most visible facet of higher education internationalization, much attention is now directed also to internationalization cutting across all key institutional missions and integrated into the ethos and key functions of higher education. The crisis has equally brought many organizational challenges, forcing institutions to rethink their priorities and their governance model. In order to redefine what internationalization truly is and how it will work for each of our institutions is noteworthy. Internationalization will therefore need to include a greater collaboration, discussion and development with key stakeholders (students, academic and administrative staff, partners, accrediting bodies). In sum, international in the future will mean very different things to each institution – but for the sake of collaboration and engagement, we shall need to learn to share our definitions and objectives a lot more openly.

[Author's Introduction: Najma Lashkarian is an International facilitator. She is also an independent researcher and Human Rights activist. Her areas of interests are Cultural Studies, English Language, Women Studies and Violence against Women. She brings more than 20 years of her life experience to the table. Currently, she is the Assistant Director of International Relations with the Kolkata-based Adamas University.]



Why McLuhan Would have Rooted for Media Psychology?

Academic and researcher Nitesh Tripathi writes a pleasant piece on why media psychology is important in the contemporary context.



If you have already started reading this article, then let me tell you that this was just a bait to make you read it. Well, the title could have been 'Relevance of Media Psychology in Present Times'. But let's face it! Only a few of you would

have read it then. But on a serious note, what exactly is 'Media Psychology'? To answer this, try to answer these rhetorical questions. Can you predict whether technology would usher in a dystopian world predicted by George Orwell or a utopian World of Aldous Huxley? Can you speculate if Skynet would invade and enslave the world? Or, will technology give rise to a new era of humanity where all the present problems of the world will be solved? Believe it or not, the answer is 'all in your head'. You don't need to be Nostradamus to predict this as simple understanding of technology and psychology can help in answering these questions to an extent.





Media psychology is a word that you might not have heard often and might find it boring but still it is very important and relevant in present times. It is a combination of two words 'Media' and 'Psychology' and is a branch of psychology that focuses on interaction of human beings with media technologies such as internet, smartphone, tablet, television etc. The field deals with use, design, impact and sharing behaviour of human beings. The field of media psychology came into existence due to the

While majorly the focus of researchers is to study the negative effects of media, but presently a growing body of research is also studying the scope of video games, virtual reality, and social media.

intersection of sociology, media, communication studies and psychology. Its origin can be traced back to the time when media technologies such as television and radio were still in their infancy. In World War I and II, radio and television were extensively used by the world powers to advance their propaganda and ideology. Communication researchers carried out research to find whether audience receiving such messages were influenced by them or not. When television became popular among American households, concerns grew regarding its impact on audience especially the children. Psychologists felt that the 'Idiot Box' was not contributing towards the development of intellect of audience but rather making them dumb, insensitive, aggressive and vulnerable. In later years, questions arose on whether the audience processed media messages actively or passively. The Payne Fund Studies were conducted to determine the effects of movies on the behaviour of children and adolescents and were instrumental in the enforcement of the Hays

Code (self-censorship of film content). George Gerbner gave the Cultivation Theory which helped in examining the long-term effects of television. He believed that people who watch a lot of television (heavy viewers) are likely to be more influenced by the ways in which the world is framed and suffer from Mean World Syndrome. Alfred Kinsey's research on human sexual behaviour led to 'Sexual Revolution' both in content of media and in the society of America. Albert Bandura performed the 'Bobo Doll Experiments' where he studied children's behaviour after they watched a human adult model act aggressively towards a Bobo doll. After this experiment, he came up with the Social

Learning Theory. In 1987, American Psychological Association (APA) created a new division

Media Psychology is a word that you might not have heard often and might find it boring but still it is very important and relevant in present times.

named 'Division 46-Media Psychology', which later became one of the fastest growing divisions in the APA. In the present digital era, as virtual reality turns into the preferred reality, 'Second Life' becomes the primary life, and Social Media becomes the socializing spot for netizens, it is obvious that concerns would arise regarding their impact and shaping of behaviours. Weeb, iGen, selfie, meme, phubbing, emoji, Rinsta, streak, binge watch are the new words that the dictionaries are updating every year. Such terms didn't exist even a few decades ago. But in today's time, new phenomena are emerging due to rise, spread and ubiquity of media technologies.



There is a need to understand how such phenomena are changing the society. New questions such as “Does clicking too many selfies (and posting them) display narcissism?”, “Is frequent checking of phone a form of OCD?”, “Why viewers binge watch?”, “How much of sharing is too much?”, “Are we spending too much time on social media?”, “Why a video becomes viral?” are gaining attention of researchers. In fact a new dimension has emerged out of this – Cyber Psychology, which focuses on the psychological consequences of usage of the Internet. We are vulnerable, helpless, and gullible to the attention-grabbing tricks of media (a fine example is you reading this article). But why did you start reading this article in the first place? That's because we are psychologically shaped to respond, react, and redirect our attention to something that is unique, interesting, and sensational. Evolution has molded us into attentive, and information seeking organisms. Humans had trained their senses to sense danger, find food, and seek information. But in primitive age, there were risks and scarcity of resources. But now there is plenty of everything (food, information, and off course distractions) and it has been possible due to the information revolution and technological progress. But with surplus of information and content, it is now becoming difficult for media companies, advertisers and marketers to capture attention. This is the reason they resort to practices such as using bold/ flashy headlines or bright coloured visuals to attract our attention.

If you are still not convinced if media psychology should be studied, then wait!! There are some statistics that would surprise you (or rather shock you). With a population of 7.8 billion in the World, there are more than five billion mobile phone users, four billion Internet users and three

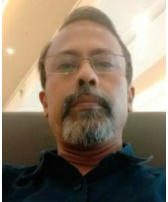
billion Social Media users. Around the world, people spend 474 minutes on media and 395 minutes on digital media daily. Statistics have revealed that smartphone users pick up their phone on an average 27 times per day ranging from 14 to 150 times a day. A typical user has account on more than eight different social media platforms and spends two hours 30 minutes on an average per day on them.

There is a need for deeper understanding of media psychology for various reasons: among audience (to find how they are tricked into viewing a content), marketers and media organizations (to invent new ways to capture attention), and researchers (to understand the impact of media technologies). While majorly the focus of researchers is to study the negative effects of media, but presently a growing body of research is also studying the scope of video games, virtual reality, and social media in areas such as: improving attention among ADHD children, online education and learning, skill development, formation of social bonds etc. Now, coming back to the question that the title of article raises, “Why would have McLuhan supported Media Psychology?” The reason is simple. He was a hard-technological determinist and believed that technology is shaping people rather than the opposite. He would have wanted an evidence-based affirmation of his belief that technology is affecting people. And this is where Media Psychology comes into play.

[Author's Introduction: Nitesh Tripathi is an Assistant Professor at the School of Media & Communication under Adamas University in Kolkata. He is a graduate in mass communication and a post-graduate in media research. Apart from regular teaching, he is also pursuing his Ph.D. in media psychology from Banaras Hindu University.]



MOOCs: A Viable Academic Alternative



*Academic and researcher
Amal Sankar Mukherjee
deliberates on the scope
of MOOCs in India and
elsewhere.*

Introduction

A Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is a web-based platform that provides an unlimited number of students worldwide with a chance of distance education with the best institutes

in the world. It was established back in 2008 and gained momentum in 2012 as a popular learning tool. Many MOOCs have communities that have interactive sessions and forums between the student, professors, and Teaching Assistants (TAs) along with the study/ course materials and video lectures. So, if there is a particular course that learners from different levels of education want to pursue but cannot, they have the option of considering a MOOC for that particular chosen higher education path. Most MOOCs are made by universities. Some of the first and most active MOOC makers





Some MOOCs are made by companies, such as Microsoft or Google, or by various organizations, such as IEEE or the Linux Foundation.

are *Stanford*, *MIT* and *Harvard*. Some MOOCs are also made by companies, such as *Microsoft* or *Google*, or by various organizations, such as *IEEE* or the *Linux Foundation*.

How MOOCs Work

Think of it like an online platform where students and teachers come together and form an online pool of resources, which are readily available to utilize. MOOCs have gained quite a bit of popularity in India. There are various notable institutions, both non-profit and commercial, that offer these courses worldwide with the help of MOOC providers. A few popular MOOC providers include *NPTEL* [Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) offer online courses through this platform which require no registration and are free of cost], *WizIQ* (IIT Delhi offers courses through this platform, which requires registration and course fees), *Open2Study*, *Coursera*, *edX*, *Udemy* and the likes.

MOOC Programmes in Indian Education

The *University Grants Commission (UGC)* along with the *HRD (Human Resource Development) Ministry* has launched the MOOC programmes in India for higher secondary, bachelor's, and master's degrees. This covers a wide range of subjects that may or may not be taught in regular campus studies. A new portal for MOOCs named 'Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds' or in short, *SWAYAM*, is said to present students with an opportunity to study anything from a list of 2,000 courses out of which 200 are currently available for registration. Audio-visual materials, illustrations, research and case studies with self-assessments are a few of the avenues chosen for the conduction of these courses. To provide further information on *SWAYAM* and MOOCs in general, Prof. A. K. Bakshi, the Chairman of the Centre for E-Learning, said, "These online courses

have been developed by a team of senior academicians and are expected to enhance the gross enrolment ratio in higher education without compromising with the quality. These courses will also help in bridging the digital divide in the country."

Future and Scope of MOOCs in Indian Education

As it is being pointed out, MOOCs cannot replace the traditional approach of classroom learning but it can be used as an alternative method to bridge the gap between various schools of learning. It has been said however that MOOCs have certain limitations:

Although digitalization is a must now, many nations are unable to provide the necessities to enroll for MOOCs. Hence the spread of MOOCs is limited.

It is not always certain that all MOOCs provide degrees, certificates, and/ or diplomas which limits the number of candidates that enroll for these courses as many companies ask for records of the education levels achieved and candidates are unable to provide them with the same.

A student's life is confined to one room that has internet access and a laptop or a computer, which allows little or no interaction with the outside world.

Employment Opportunities Post Online Education

The new world of online education provides inexpensive education of college-level courses in many fields of study. However, it is said that employers are not completely convinced with the level of education and coursework provided by the MOOCs unless the candidate is looking for jobs in the Technology or Computer Science sector.

Conclusion

Generally, it is said that MOOCs are focused on providing education that will improve skills in specific fields of study, mostly focused on technology, science,

Although digitalization is a must now, many nations are unable to provide the necessities to enroll for MOOCs. Hence the spread of MOOCs is limited.





and mathematics. Although some of the online courses provide records of completion of the courses, the online education concept is relatively new. It is

Think of it like an online platform where students and teachers come together and form an online pool of resources, which is readily available to utilize.

found that students are ready for this new concept. However many employers are still hesitant and skeptical about it. MOOCs are a great platform for higher education not just in India but all over the world. Most MOOCs are free and all are accessible to any learner with an internet connection and basic computer equipment. Dropping out of a MOOC also carries fewer penalties than it would for a traditional college-level class, and students' are marked by peer review and/ or automatically-marked tests, decreasing stress and burdens even further.

[Author's Introduction: Amal Sankar Mukherjee is currently an Assistant Professor with the School of Education under Adamas University in Kolkata. He previously worked as an Assistant Professor at Kolkata Teachers Training College for 13 years. He has eight published books in the field of education.]



Modern Education Should Give both Qualifications and Skills



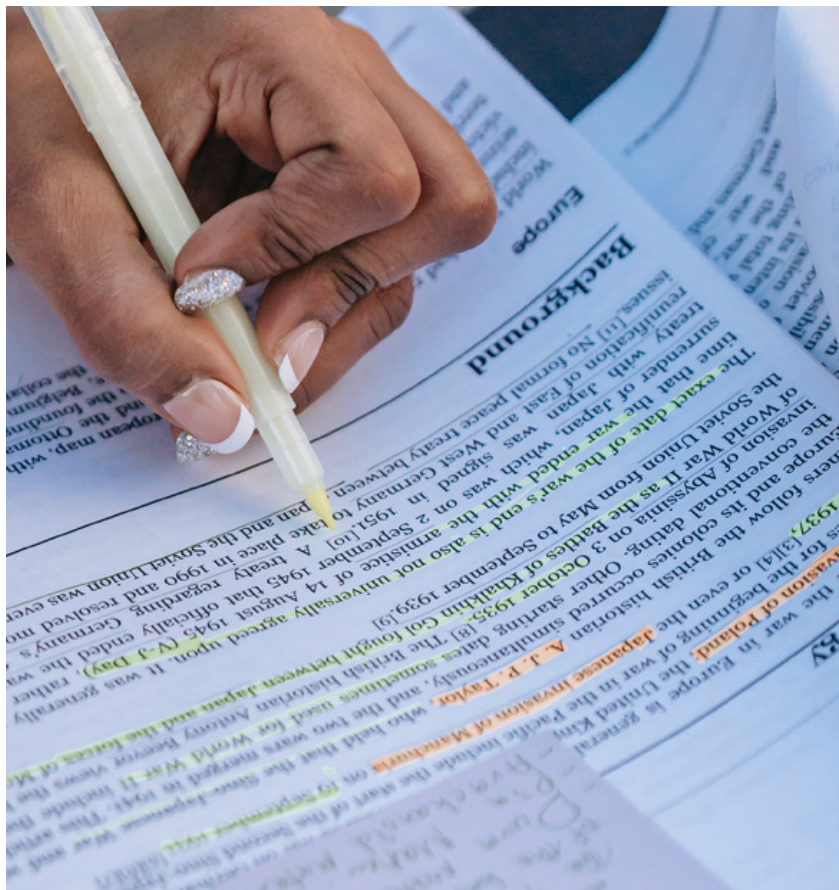
Academic and administrator Dr. Koushik Chakraborty deliberates on the dual importance of qualifications and skills in contemporary education.

The global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015, seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. Such a lofty goal will require the entire education system to be reconfigured to support and foster

learning, so that all of the critical targets and goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved.

The world is undergoing rapid changes with various dramatic scientific and technological advances like the rise of big data, machine learning, artificial intelligence, replacement of unskilled jobs by machines. On the contrary, there is a need for skilled workforce, particularly involving mathematics, computer science and data science, in conjunction with multidisciplinary abilities across the sciences, social sciences and humanities. India's Education Policy lays specific emphasis on the development of creative potential of individuals, which is based on the principle that education must develop ‘foundational’ as well as ‘literacy





and numeracy' and 'higher-order' capacities. Skill education could play a major for the development of the creative potentials of individuals. It is also suggested that for the appointment at any level, teachers must have passed the Teaching Methodology Training Programme as discussed above. It should be compulsory for the candidate to register themselves in the research degree Programme i.e. Ph.D. within a month after the appointment. For this

purpose, the Government of India (GOI) should establish Teaching Methodology Institutions under PPP Module all over India. The curricula of their training should be helpful in their teaching because faculty members have sufficient knowledge about their areas of specialization but in some way or the other, they are lacking the knowledge of lecture deliverance, classroom management, use of ICTs etc.

Analysis and Observations

■ Implementation of

Unique Teaching Methodology: The government should emphasize on the establishment of Teaching Methodology Institutions under the PPP model across the country so that before entering the education system, faculty members have sufficient knowledge about teaching tools, education plans, psychology, preparation of lectures in the classrooms, ICT tools, team work, classroom management, research course work, curriculum

The world is undergoing rapid changes with various dramatic scientific and technological advances like the rise of big data, machine learning, artificial intelligence, replacement of unskilled jobs by machines.

preparation ethics, developing question methods, soft skills, content writing skills, academic administration, laboratory management etc. After joining as an Assistant Professor, it should be compulsory for the candidate to be enrolled for Ph.D. within a month or within the minimum time limit in the institutions where he/ she is given appointment for the post of Assistant Professor.

■ **Formation of Intellectual Capital Database (ICD)/**

Research Hub: The *Government of India* should form a database of intellectual capital to enlist all the professors (above the age of 50) of India for the purpose of providing guest lectures, visiting lectures, walk-in-research projects and higher academic positions like Vice-Chancellor, Principal/ Director/ Proctor etc. to the HEIs of India. A professor can be deputed from the intellectual capital, as per the requirement of the concerned HEI. The GOI should also offer fixed salary to all professors of the HEI. The institution should also pay 50 per cent of the total remuneration of a professor who is called

for a particular academic activity and the rest 50 per cent of the remuneration should be deposited in the account of the ICD. In this way, the nation could be benefitted with the knowledge and experience of qualified intellectual capital. Professor should be attached to online portals so that they can share their knowledge as per the requirement of the higher educational institutes.

After the applicability of working module, the HEI can approach to a single place i.e. for the following purpose:

- Conduction of

Faculty members have sufficient knowledge about their areas of specialization but in some way or the other, they are lacking the knowledge of lecture deliverance.



Guest Lectures/ IPR etc.

- Social contribution through research activities.
- Educational enhancement in school education.
- Research Supervisors/ Projects Guidance.
- Typical laboratory work.
- Database of local research hub at the HEI.

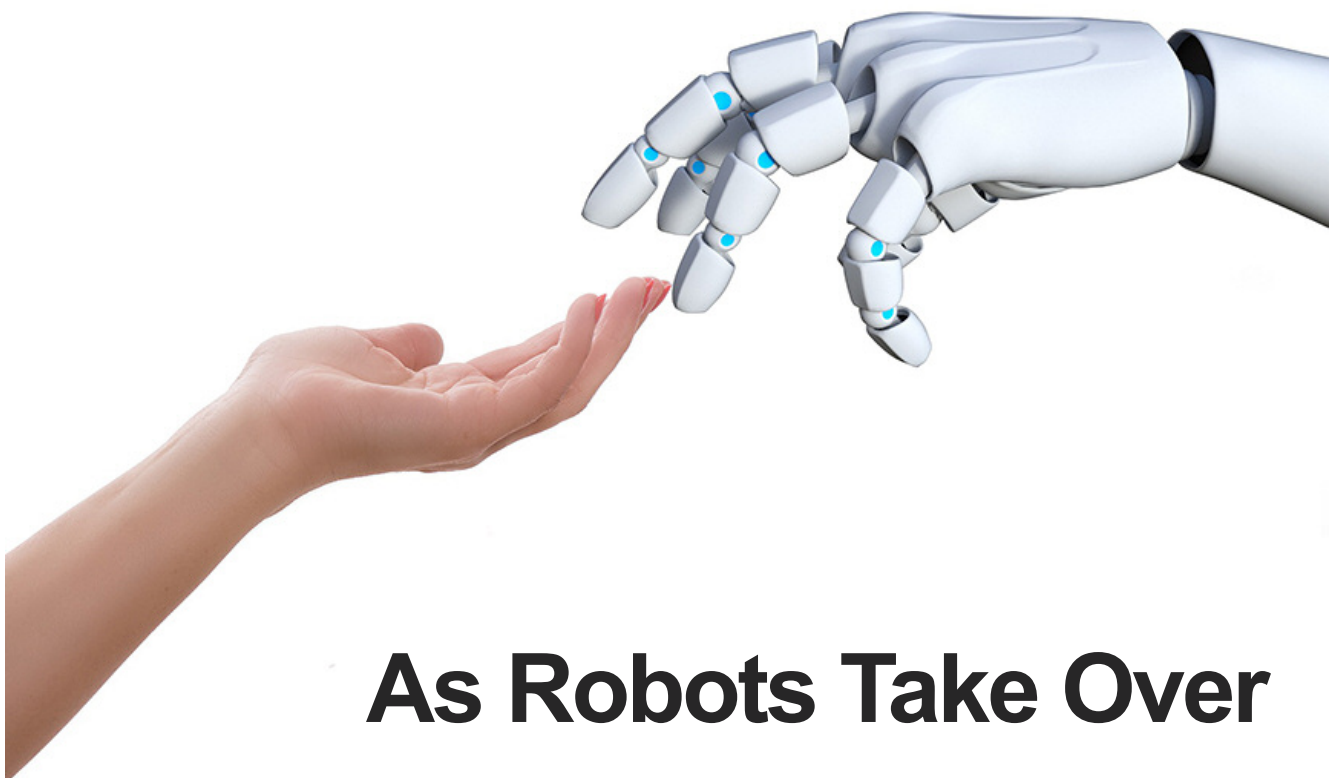
Provide research facilities toward researcher/ industries/ other organization.

Conclusion: If the above-mentioned procedures of teaching methodology, appointment and promotion of the teachers and formation of the '**Intellectual Capital Database/ Research Hub**' come into existence, it will improve the current educational system and bridge the gap between the required teachers and the current availability of teachers.

The Government of India (GOI) should establish Teaching Methodology Institutions under PPP Module all over India.

[Author's Introduction: Academic and administrator Dr. Koushik Chakraborty is currently the Assistant Registrar (Academics) at the Kolkata-based Adamas University. He has a Ph.D. in Image Processing. With more than a decade in the teaching and administrative domains, Dr. Chakraborty has published numerous papers and book chapters. He also has more than one patent to his credit.]





As Robots Take Over

Ex-IITian and noted techie Kinshuk Adhikary gives a fascinating account of how robots are slowly going to take over the human civilization.



Introduction

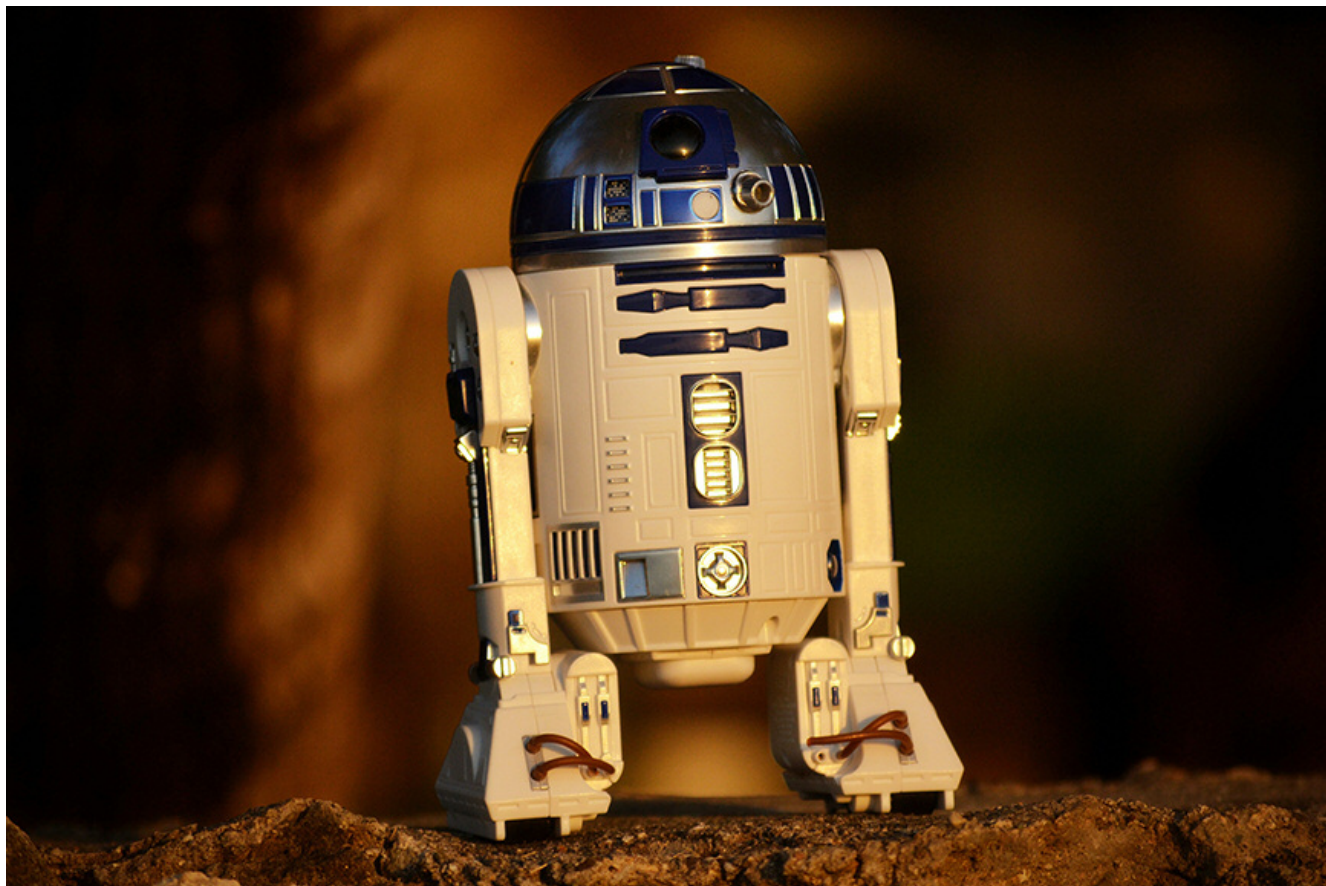
This must be the 50000th article on this topic! However, with moving times, we are getting closer and closer to this situation. It may be worthwhile to take a look again.

We Have 3 Different Levels of Visualizing “Robots”

As “*intelligent vacuum cleaner*”. Machines that can move all over a room on their own, navigate objects, detect and clean the dirt, pack up after they are

done, and go back to their storage places. Certainly this situation, given that we now have self-driven cars, is already here.

As “*multi-purpose drone companions*”. This machine looks human-like, but it can fly. It can do vacuum cleaning, use other (dumber) machines, act as a companion, converse, take notes, do some cooking (if given the ingredients in a specified way), pick fetch and place things nicely etc. [And now already we are in a “visionary” zone. Even at Boston Dynamics, which is often vocal about the state of its latest robotic research, this is a pretty tall order.] As an “*obedient well-trained chimpanzee*” – but a chimpanzee with an autonomous (self-decisioning) brain, mind you. It can be trained to do many tasks accurately and faultlessly on its own, without supervision. But this 3rd kind of robot may suddenly decide to switch off your favorite TV channel while you are watching it, if it does not “like” the



programme. That is why this third level is a bit more than “visionary” !

Let me expand a bit further. No computer programme exists till date that can “jump out of its loop” i.e. decide to do something quite on its own, something it has not been “programmed for” (thus exercising its own “will”). The self-driving cars we see today cannot work in places where no road signs exist.

Yet, we all seem to agree that unless a machine can act on its own, it can hardly be called intelligent. Vast philosophical and practical problems arise at this point, not to mention mathematical ones.

Two Main Forces Driving Robotic Adoption

Economic: That we need slave labour is an inescapable economic fact. Most human migrations are driven by the fact that there is a pool of cheap manual labour available, and a rich society (perhaps elderly and lacking enough

young hands) who needs them desperately.

Military: Another major driving force for increasing robotization is war and occupation. It is clear that merely throwing missiles from a distance will not work against hostile, guerilla environments.

Some Roadblocks to Robotic Adoption

No computer programme exists till date that can “jump out of its loop” i.e. decide to do something quite on its own, something it has not been “programmed for” (thus exercising its own “will”).

Power Packs: We do not really have the kind of small power containers needed to do mechanical movements without frequent re-fuelling or re-charging.

Language Capabilities: In another 10 years, voice will be the most common way we shall interact with machines. However, we are still a long way off from accurate recognition, analysis and synthesis of all the wide and loose variations of human languages.

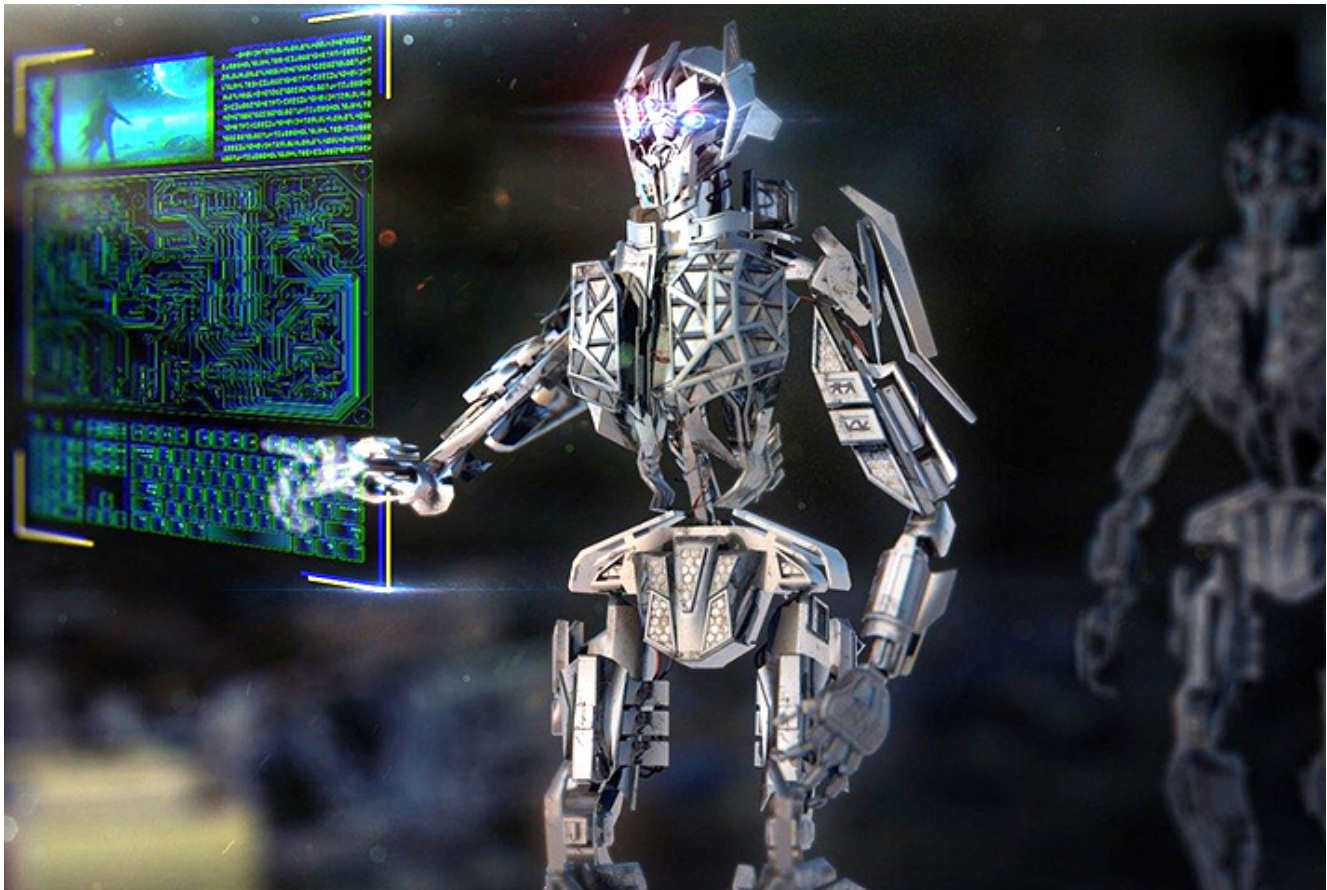
Autonomous Brain: A most basic flaw applies to almost all of AI research today, which is that we are doing all this very empirically, without really any strong theoretical basis. What we really do is "pattern recognition". Almost all our "intelligent" functions work this way – (a) they are "trained", using large amounts of previously labeled data (b) the model helps to "match" new data given to it, and can now label/ classify/ predict such

**Taking over happens
when we stop exercising
mastery, when we give
away what we have.**

"new" situations based on its previous "model training".

Note that there is almost no logic, inference or "thinking" involved in this process. What is involved is "match" and "prediction", and predictions by their very nature have inaccuracies.

That is why AI works in very limited constrained environments. Can such a theory-less methodology work in unconstrained environments, with





previously unknown datasets?

The honest answer is, no one knows.

Let's Assume We Have Overcome These Roadblocks

How will our society look?

Japan has the highest social interest in robots, (in industrial robots, China occupies the top slot). Japan's aging yet rich population, low availability of cheap labour and young hands, make it in many ways the ideal robotic adoption society. Not just that, Japan has had a cultural affinity for mechanical toys that goes back centuries into the past.

Since the 1990s, robots (of some level) are being used in industry, nursing and healthcare, companion-ship pets, rescue and rough-terrain work, security and mobility.

Strangely Japan also has a high proportion of "Hikikomori" – i.e. young people who shun all contact with society. Sociologists are still scratching their heads trying to find a connection.

Turing's "Army": During WW2, Alan Turing laid the foundations of practical computing. What is less well-known is, helping the handful of

mathematicians who were actually breaking the codes, was an "army" of 200-odd ladies, who looked after all routine functions of the Bombe machines. This "Turing's army phenomenon" may almost lay guidelines for management of a future that has powerful intelligent machines.

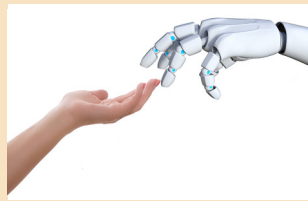
1. "Behind-the-Screen Experts": A handful of mathematicians who have complete mastery over the machine, can modify them based on the society's needs.

2. "Human-Parts of the Machine": Who works sitting "in front of the screen" i.e. they depend upon but can never override the machine. They fill up the "parts" that full-automation cannot always manage.

3. "Machine-agnostic": These are people whose work rarely requires the machine, who are not dependent on it, who are unaffected by it – such a population will get lesser and lesser.

"Alexa, do not listen to my mother, she is a bad Mum": I actually heard a small girl screaming this at Alexa. It was an eye-opener.

The boundary between human and machine, virtual and real, gets more and more blurred. From being seen as



Most human migrations are driven by the fact that there is a pool of cheap manual labour available, and a rich society (perhaps elderly and lacking enough young hands) who needs them desperately.

provider-slaves, machines will be seen as companion-partners, and perhaps even protecting-fathers. From there onwards to a god-like aura, the *Deus ex machina* (god-in-the-machine) is a very small step.

Already we know that "most decisions are made by machines". Humans being "in

charge" is already a myth. But the need to "believe" in someone-in-charge is paramount in human beings.

The Notion of "Ownership" of Robots

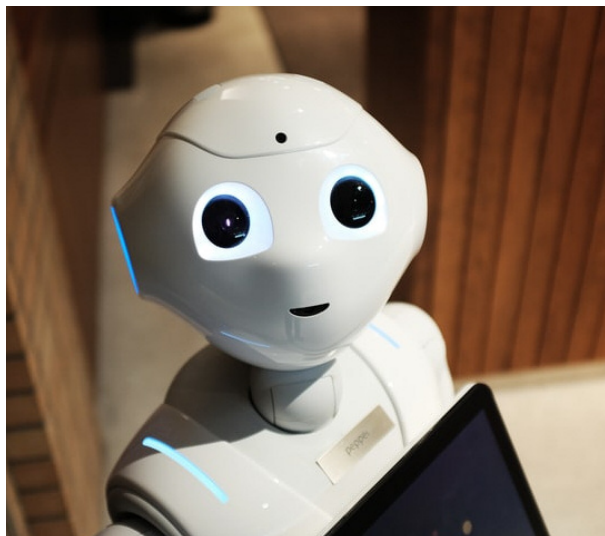
The notion of ownership is changing. Who really "owns" all these virtual "assets"? What happens to them when one dies? Are they bequeathed in inheritance? Who really owns content? Who are the customers in social media, who are employees, and who are producers and consumers?

Who owns "data"? This is an explosive issue already in our society, privacy concerns and so forth.

This blurring of "ownership" becomes even more interesting when it comes to robots. All robots will depend heavily on data. More and varied data makes a better robot. We need to understand that mere physical boundaries mean anything to a cerebral object.

A robot which works like a "frog in a well" will be in many ways inferior to "social robots" that communicate to each other, that constantly exchange data with each other, that constantly "learn" from each other.

From the very beginning



of the robotic age, robots are likely to be a “group” rather than individuals. Such “social robots” cannot be owned privately, they are a “social asset”. Worse still, isolated “private robots” can even be manipulated to harm society (e.g. they can be taught to steal, commit crimes etc). So it is very likely that private ownership of robots will be banned. In an “information society”, any attempt to hamper the free-flow of information is unlikely to work.

“Take Over” does not always happen!:

Given such a “community of robots”, we can easily imagine the worst, i.e. robots taking over.

“Taking over” need not necessarily mean “by force”. It can happen almost unknown to us. Consider the following: – when we stopped doing mental mathematics, calculating machines “took

over”. – when we reduced physical contact with others, the mobile phone “took over”.

Taking over happens when we stop exercising mastery, when we give away what we have. Usually because we are too lazy, we do not make efforts, we do not learn, we take the easy ways, and we obey.

However, mankind hasn’t always allowed such takeover. Often (as during the Renaissance era), they have in fact taken back their turf, won back their place. Won back all the ideas of liberty, aesthetics, art, science and culture – that for nearly 1500 years had nearly vanished after the Greco-Roman empire.

For example, think of this. Robots are unlikely to have “emotions” (at least not in the foreseeable future). Today, we see this as a plus-point, at least for mechanical working. But emotions are also the springboard of all human endeavour and channeling of energies! We may have many other sources of strength, to resist such a “take over”. Only time can tell.

[Author’s Introduction: A pass out from IIT-Kharagpur, Kinshuk Adhikary has 28 years of experience in the industry – 16 years in a “purely technical” role as software architect and 12 years in high value business development roles. He has held senior positions with renowned companies such as Hyundai and L&T. He has also held the Head of Technology roles in smaller organizations with tech and business responsibilities. He has been instrumental in architecting (designing and creating) several enterprise software products for U.S/ U.K companies. He promotes management with a strong technology culture. Kinshuk is hands-on and is easily conversant with cutting-edge technologies. He still learns IT/ software, now as a hobby.]

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Role of Strategic Communications in Brand Building during Covid-19

*Renowned author and communicator **Dr. Mahul Brahma** talks about the importance of strategic communications in brand building during the pandemic.*

In today's emerging VUCA world, communication is increasingly playing a strategic role in helping corporates build their brands.



Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity – these four elements form what is known as the emerging VUCA world. This phrase has found a new meaning with the onset of Covid-19 as it somewhat captures the pulse of the emerging world, which is tormented especially by the uncertainty and volatility. These are not normal times, these are times when we are re-calibrated towards survival, so building a brand becomes more challenging during these times.

In uncertain times, the only tool that can be effective towards establishing trust of a

brand, which is the cornerstone for building a brand, is strategic communication. So, with this arsenal of strategic communication, a leader needs to build the brand, build the trust, with the customers and key stakeholders in these Covid-19 times.

Strategic Communications – Then and Now

Every society, every civilisation, every

race, devised their own way to strategically communicate to its people towards building their brands – it can be about achievements, about the divine right to lead, as well as claims of religious authority of the king to lead the people. A few examples of strategic propaganda are a clay tablet found in ancient Iraq promoting more advanced agricultural techniques or the pyramids, obelisks and statues by Babylonian, Egyptian and Persian leaders.

So, as we can see, historically, strategic communication has been used to drive key agenda, including growth and brand building. Things have not changed in today's emerging VUCA world, and all it takes is to incorporate a strategy to transform strategic communication into a growth driver and a brand builder.

Steps for Using Strategic Communication towards Brand Building

As I have explained in my latest book *How to Communicate Strategically in Corporate World*, the first step towards strategizing is to do a SWOT analysis wherein you identify organisational strength, weakness, opportunities and threats that are needed to build its brand

For communication to play a strategic role in building a brand, it is important that communication aides the company in achieving the strategic objectives utilising the strengths and opportunities available, leveraging on this alignment.



and drive growth. And, then you do a similar analysis for strategic communications. Then comes the key role of aligning the two. For communication to play a strategic role in building a brand, it is important that communication aides the company in achieving the strategic objectives utilising the strengths and opportunities available, leveraging on this



alignment.

For a leader, the next step towards building brand and thus driving growth is to identify the target customer and cluster them as per their attributes. For example, a client can be divided into two segments such as existing and potential. Then you have other stakeholders such as internal customers or employees,

promoters and partners. Once the key stakeholders are identified then a leader needs to further drill down and identify how to reach key decision makers in each of these segments so that the brand attributes can be shared. This is a key step towards laying the foundation of brand building.

The target audience classification needs to be very exhaustive as in today's emerging VUCA world, only targeted and customised communication work.

The identification of key clients needs to have an alignment with the business needs of the organisation so that it can achieve its strategic objective of building the brand.

What to Communicate

Once a leader has clarity till the last level of communication, it is time to identify the content wherein the leader will communicate the brand attributes.

Relevance as well as packaging of content holds the key to engagement of a key stakeholder.

The steps become easy once a leader puts himself or herself in the shoes of the stakeholder. For example, a CXO will not like to see a pitch document. He/ She will

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be more interested in very crisp one or two-pager knowledge pieces on business trends. This will help you become relevant to the CXOs. Similarly, when handling media, you have to be careful of the relevance of news that you want them to publish which will help build the brand. The news needs to have a wider appeal to the readers of the publication. While it may be the cover story of your internal magazine, the same news may not be relevant at all to an editor.

In some cases, a leader may have to share the same news across multiple target audiences but then the same news needs to be packaged accordingly. The internal magazine cover story may be reduced to a line in CXO communication. Therefore, both packaging and content matter while sharing the brand story.

Strategy Remains the Key

In brand building, the name of the game is strategic alignment to the organisational goals. Every communication – media, branding, corporate, financial, internal, social media, etc. – needs to have the objective of enhancing the business of the organisation and building the brand. Every communication needs to have a strategic alignment with the overall brand story. It is very important for a leader to not be confined to a silo and always keep an eye on the big picture. The thinking needs to move from tactical to strategic. The objective of a leader has to be to convert communications into a growth driver for the organisation.

On Strategic Communication during Covid-19 Crisis

These are the Covid-19 Times that has hit the economy real hard. So, this is the time of crisis and thus crisis takes the centre-stage.

There are two types of crisis – one where the organisation is the only one impacted, let's call it traditional, and the other where the industry or overall economy is

A leader needs to be sensitive and empathetic to the overall ecosystem demonstratively in actions and communications.





Every society, every civilisation, every race, devised their own way to strategically communicate to its people towards building their brands.

impacted, just like the Covid-19 times. The latter is an opportunity and not a crisis. Let me elaborate!

There is no denying these are hard times. Economic growth has taken a hit, industries across sectors are making losses, some are even shutting down, people are losing jobs and livelihoods. Wherever you look there is negative news. So, now even if a company is not cutting down on the workforce, it makes a good story. Even if a company is not cutting salaries, it makes a good story. And if an organisation is managing to grow and give bonus to its employees, it will make a great story. In good times, these stories are in abundance and so lost in the crowd. Everyone has become fatigued with negativity all around and so they want to hear something good in the air.

So, this is the best time to build the brand. The only caution that a leader has to maintain is – there needs to be a lot of sensitivity and empathy in the way the news is communicated. It is critical to be aware of the ecosystem and placing a positive story sensitively in a negative environment is an art that leaders have to master.

So, your news needs on brand story to be placed as a sunshine story and not as a story that has a “boastful” tenour. With the latter, the story is bound to backfire. This subtle art will make more and more people interested in your organisation. Sensitivity and empathy play a key role in communicating during a crisis. The communication can be to internal stakeholders or to external clients, stakeholders such as shareholders and media. If there is a sunshine story, it needs to be shared across all segments so that the sun keeps shining on the organisation with the support of all the stakeholders. These two vital elements during a leader's communication will make sure that there is no alienation of the organisation because of insensitivity or demonstration



of lack of empathy while telling the brand story.

A leader needs to be sensitive and empathetic to the overall ecosystem demonstratively in actions and communications. So, every communication needs to showcase these two elements prominently and then to subtly include the achievement as a sunshine story generating hope for the overall industry. These are the stories that make history and a leader needs to learn the fine art of communication whether one is communicating a positive story or handling a crisis. With empathy and sensitivity, even the internal stakeholders

In brand building, the name of the game is strategic alignment to the organisational goals.

understand why extreme measures sometimes need to be taken to keep the organisation afloat and also take the brand story forward.

In these tough times, every bit of positive brand-building story, which usually gets lost in a crowded news space, gets prominence. So, leaders need to make the best use of such crisis using the right mix of empathy and sensitivity.

Never let a crisis go waste...build your brand!

[Author's Introduction: Dr. Mahul Brahma is a D.Litt. and Ph.D. He is the author of five books including *How to Communicate Strategically in Corporate World* and *The Luxe Trilogy (Decoding Luxe, Dark Luxe and Luxe Inferno)*. He is a columnist, luxury commentator, chief editor and head of CSR, Corporate Communications, Branding, and Publications for *mjunction* (a joint venture between Tata Steel and SAIL). He is an alumnus of IIM Calcutta, MICA, University of Cambridge Judge Business School, SSSUTMS and St. Xavier's College. He loves to make films, act, paint and play golf. His first short film was screened at the Cannes Film Festival.]



Tackling Global Recession: Top 10 Measures to be Taken



Educationist

Sabyasachi Mondal
prescribes easy solutions to tackle the global recession caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.



When the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) predicted an economic contraction of 8.6 per cent of Indian economy for the second quarter of the financial year 2020-2021, it was understood that technically a recession has arrived. Though the contraction of 8.6 per cent is less than 23.9 per cent in the last quarter, the persistent negative growth for consecutive quarters is a cause of concern. The situation is no different world over.

What Is a Recessionary Phase?

For an economics or finance aficionado, the definition of a recessionary phase sounds like one of those easiest questions in a college examination. However, for the uninitiated, recessionary phase indicates a consistent decline in economic activities for a considerable amount of time. It is different from a typical expansionary peak, contraction and trough model of a business cycle due to the fact that the contraction in recessionary phase is prolonged. However, pundits differ in defining the duration of a recession as in how long the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) should contract to term it as recession. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) of USA suggests that a recession may last from few months to more than a



year. Technically, the decline in GDP for more than two consecutive quarters may be termed as a recessionary phase. With this definition in mind, India seems to have entered in the phase at the end of September. All these happened at the backdrop of a deadly pandemic.

The Deadly Pandemic and Its Aftermath

It was December 31, 2019 when China reported a pneumonia-

like disease in Wuhan which was identified as a novel Coronavirus. But it was not before January 5, 2020 that the world knew about its existence when WHO published its first report. The market apparently didn't take the first signs seriously and it was not until February 20, 2020 that they realized that something is not right. By that time, the pandemic started spreading across the world and the market has slowly started

to crumble.

From February 20, 2020 to February 28, 2020, Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) from USA dropped nearly 12 per cent, FTSE 100 from London tanked 11.5 per cent and Nikkei 225 from Japan shaded nearly 10 per cent. Taking the clue from these markets, the benchmark BSE Sensex tanked nearly 7 per cent within that period. The mayhem continued thereafter and Sensex crash landed to 25981 on



March 23, 2020 losing nearly a whopping 37 per cent from the peak of 41170 in February 20, 2020.

The Market Meltdown and Decline in GDP

The crash in global as well as Indian stock market was caused largely by the unabashed fear about the spread of the deadly pandemic. It is well known that the equity market runs on hope, fear and greed. As all the global markets are

connected to each other, a fall somewhere out of fear will lead to the fall in others because fear is contagious. In the meantime, Governmental lockdown world over crippled the economy as production virtually stopped and so did the demand. As a result, the \$2.9 trillion Indian economy sunk and triggered the GDP squeeze in the ensuing quarters. This has necessitated an initiation of measures to tackle the recession world over.

1. Ensuring People's Livelihood

The economic slowdown is exacerbated by a humanitarian crisis. In developing countries, especially India, workers travel for long distance to big metro cities away from their native place to earn livelihood. A sudden lockdown demanded them to survive in a foreign location or come back to their natives. This mass exodus thus, created multiple problems across the board. Firstly, the unforgiving trudge for miles created medical and safety issues. Secondly, they left a void in their foster cities

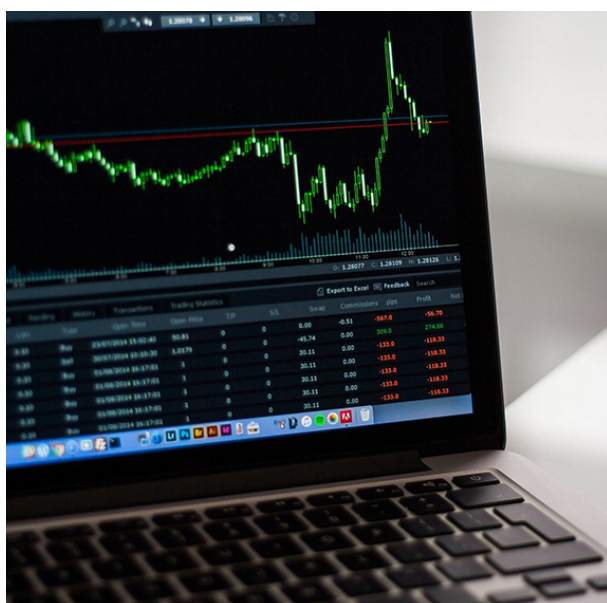
in terms of services they provided thereby crippling the local economy. Lastly, the lack of job guarantee and business opportunities in their native places kept them tied to an uncertain future. These people needs to be fostered by the government by taking immediate measures like direct cash transfer, free health insurance cover, free utilities like gas, water etc. These people are the lifeline of the

It is known that a quick recovery from the present health crises not only needs investment in the field of pharma, it also needs an overhaul of the public health infrastructure.

economy and their safety and security will ensure that the country has large supply of labour when the economy starts pulling up again.

2. Adequacy of Capital for Informal Sectors

Small businesses and informal sectors are the ones who got affected the most in this pandemic. The punishing lockdown due to the pandemic reduced their sales and made it nil in most cases. Many of them were not able to service their loans too as a result. Consequently, the flow of new capital dried up for these businesses making them incapable of carrying on. As a solution, the Government should make adequate capital available through Government backed credit guarantee schemes as proposed by Dr. Manmohan Singh in an interview with *BBC* recently even at the cost of growing Non-Performing Assets (NPA). This will ensure hassle free and easy credit availability to the distraught small business owners. Also, it should be ensured that banks give them more time to pay off their new loans by providing moratoriums.



The crash in global as well as Indian stock market was caused largely by the unabashed fear about the spread of the deadly pandemic.

3. Printing Money: Is It Viable?

The pandemic needs out of the box solutions. In a country like India, which goes through deficit financing, an unprecedented pandemic necessitates the Government to spend more in direct cash transfer to poor people and initiate other stimulus packages to kickstart the economy. The government can print money and buy back bonds from commercial banks through a process called quantitative easing. This will shore up more funds in the banking system which may later be distributed to the needy and poor, at the cost of certain increase in inflation.

4. External Borrowing

An unprecedented situation like this may mandate a government to borrow more from external sources, especially in developing economies like India. As Dr. Manmohan Singh suggested in his interview that additional 10 per cent of GDP may be borrowed and this in turn can be used to meet military, health or economic challenges. Though, it may increase the debt to GDP ratio, but if borrowing "can save lives, borders, restore livelihoods and boost economic growth, then it's worth it", he said.

However, borrowings should be used judiciously and unabashed borrowing too should be curtailed.

5. Overhauling Public Health Infrastructure

It is known that a quick recovery from the present health crises not only needs investment in the field of pharma, it also needs an overhaul of the public health infrastructure. Firstly, the pandemic has increased the demand for drugs and hygienic products. As a result, the sales shot up and prices too, prompting government to make few of these products essential commodities thereby reducing the price to make it beneficial for common man. Tax relaxations by the Government will improve the profitability of these firms that will eventually add up to the GDP of the country. Secondly, investment in hospital infrastructure will increase employment opportunities for skilled and unskilled labour alike.

6. Interest Rate Cut

It's a well-known method to boost up the spending. After the market dipped severely in March 2020, both *Bank of England* and *Federal Reserve* cut interest rates to provide relief to top businesses



and house owners. In the last quarter, the *Reserve Bank of India* (RBI) too reduced the benchmark repo rate by 75 basis point from 5.15 per cent to 4.40 per cent. The reverse repo rate too was cut by 90 basis point. The other measures include long term repo rate (LTRO) auction to the tune of Rs.1 lakh crore to inject liquidity into the system. LTRO is an unconditional loan given by the central bank to the commercial banks with a maturity period of one to three years. In general, when the central bank of a country lends at a lower interest rate, it makes the borrowing of a commercial bank easy and the loans to businesses and common public gets cheaper as a result of that. Consequently, the spending boosts up. However, the catch is that spending power should simultaneously move up with increasing demand, which unfortunately is lacking in these pandemic days. Interest rate alone, hence, is not enough to boost up the economy. A government needs to provide other stimuli to keep things moving.

7. Cut in Income Tax

To boost spending, the government may give an interim relief by cutting income

In a country like India, which goes through deficit financing, an unprecedented pandemic necessitates the Government to spend more in direct cash transfer to poor people and initiate other stimulus packages to kickstart the economy.

Small businesses and informal sectors are the ones who got affected the most in this pandemic.

tax so that more money remains with the hands of the salary earner to spend. However, an increase in disposable income is not a guarantee for a steady recovery of economy if other economic parameters are not supportive. The pandemic recession has brought down the exports, lowered house prices and pushed up unemployment rates. Only a mere increase in disposable income aided by the tax cut may not be enough to recover the economy. However, it remains one of those common government methods to tackle the downturn.

8. Mortgage Relief

The government may allow banks to take the financial hit in relation to collection of mortgage payment on houses. The banks may be allowed to delay the payment schedule or write off few installments depending on their discretion. It will alleviate the pain of few individual to pay their regular installment in these torrid times. Also, it will help corporates on the verge of bankruptcy to stem the tide of loss after fall in demand due to pandemic.

9. Boost in Public Infrastructure

The government should invest in new infrastructure projects to stimulate demand. It will create new jobs too as a result. This tried and tested formula is

being used by most of the countries in the later part of the pandemic lockdown world over. In fact, the lockdown has allowed the infrastructure firms to advance or even complete their task in record times.

10. Spending on Education and Training

The pandemic-aided recession has created unemployment in most of the sectors. Hence, the government should arm the unemployed with necessary skills and training so that they become employable. Entrepreneurship should be encouraged to the maximum.

All in all, a Government probably needs to use all these strategies together to counter the recession. Henry Ford once said, "Economy has frequently nothing whatever to do with the amount of money being spent, but with the wisdom used in spending it." The statement couldn't be more apt. The success in the current pandemic-aided recession not only depends on the strategic use of funds by the government but also by the common people.

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Vaccines for Restoration of Normalcy in 2021

Scientist and academic
Dr. Arindam Mitra
updates on the
development of Covid-19
vaccines across the
world.



Vaccines save lives and protect society from many infectious diseases such as polio, mumps, rubella among plethora of other diseases. A vaccine is a weakened or attenuated form of a microbe that stimulates body's own immune response to ward off any potential future infection. Two things are extremely important to determine the usefulness of vaccines – safety and efficacy. A typical vaccine should be safe and should not cause any disease or sickness particularly when administered to a younger, older or immunocompromised or vulnerable population of the society. It is equally important that the vaccine should confer long term immunity in single or multiple doses and prevent any further episode of the disease. Often, a booster shot is added to stimulate the immune response for longer duration of protection. The current pandemic requires the use of vaccine to combat Covid-19 on an emergency basis. Vaccines were developed at warp speed and this resulted in more than fifty vaccines in trials. Several vaccines have also been recently approved for emergency authorization around the world and more than 25 million doses have been





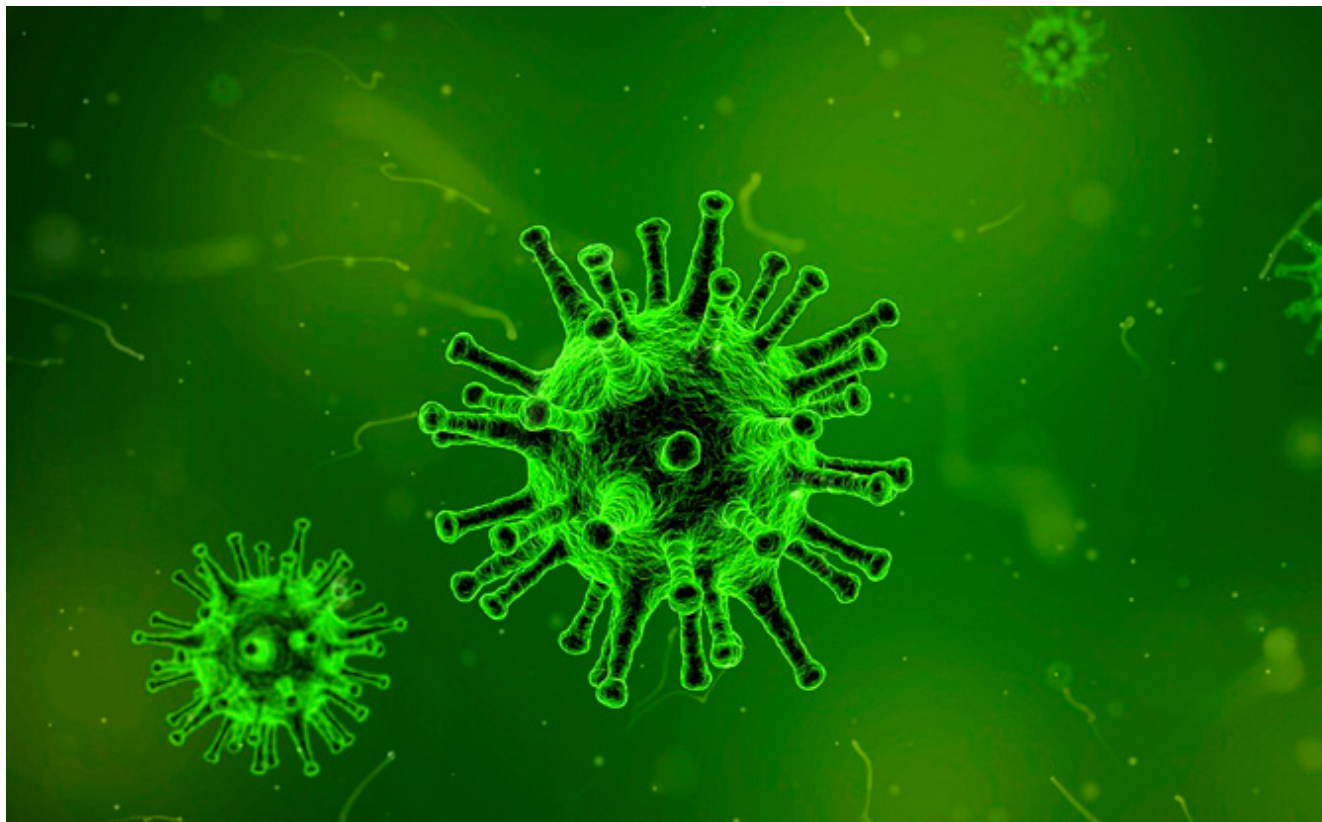
A typical vaccine should be safe and should not cause any disease or sickness particularly when administered to a younger, older or immunocompromised or vulnerable population of the society.

administered in 42 countries globally. Of importance, mRNA vaccines came into the limelight as it can be manufactured cheaply in a short span of time and can provide a strong immune response. Two mRNA vaccines from *Moderna* and *Pfizer/ BioNTech* have been shown to confer more than 90 per cent protective efficacy. Both these vaccines are safe and neither of these vaccines contain the whole virus. As a result, they have been authorized on an emergency basis to priority groups in the United States of America and more than 2.7 million people have already completed their two doses of the vaccine as of now. Vaccine safety is a priority and a smartphone-based app, v-safe was developed in the US to track health post vaccination. The app can help a person to report to *Center for Diseases Control and Prevention* (CDC) and will provide a reminder for a second dose, if required. Two doses are required in a span of three to four weeks to confer longer protection for both of these vaccines. Mild reactions have been detected post vaccination including flu-like symptoms, headache, muscle pain, etc. and these are considered reactogenic and are not associated with the vaccine safety. The minimum age for emergency use of *Pfizer/ BioNTech* and *Moderna* vaccines are 16 and 18 years respectively. Both these vaccines require cryopreservation. On the other hand, India produces more than half of the world's total vaccines annually and two vaccines have been recently approved for restricted emergency use by the *Drugs Controller General of India* (DCGI) in the beginning of January 2021. *Covaxin* from *Bharat Biotech* and *Covishield* from *Serum Institute of India* have been approved on restricted emergency use. Both these vaccines will be procured by the government and distributed to high priority groups including healthcare workers, essential duty workers and vulnerable population of the society.

Covishield has been developed in collaboration with Oxford University and AstraZeneca in an adenovirus-based model expressing the spike protein of coronavirus SARS-COV-2. Covishield has a protection efficacy of around 70 per cent and requires a booster dose six weeks after the first dose. Bharat Biotech's Covaxin has been developed in collaboration with *Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR)* and *National Institute of Virology (NIV)*. This vaccine is an inactivated virus developed on a Vero cell platform, which is known for its safety. The vaccine was found to be immunogenic and found to be safe in a number of animal studies including mice, rabbits, monkeys and others. Currently Phase III clinical trial is ongoing for both these vaccines with a larger population size. No safety concerns have been noted for either of these vaccines and both the vaccines are considered safe. Another RNA vaccine, ZyCov-D is also being developed by *Zydus Cadila*, got a nod from DCGI for phase 3 clinical trial. All vaccines should be stored between two to eight degree Celsius. Out of 1 billion people, India is planning to vaccinate 30 crores of its priority population, which would require one of the largest vaccination drives requiring a vaccination of approximately 10 lakh people per day. Logistical challenges will be there around the world to distribute the vaccines. In India, distribution and storage of vaccines in a resource constrained remote village due to lack of power or refrigeration or cold chain facility can pose difficulty in storage of vaccines. An abundant supply of needles and syringes and trained manpower are required to administer these vaccines, as these vaccines cannot be administered through the oral route. Besides, overcrowding and maintaining social distancing could be challenging during the time of vaccination. The ongoing

Several vaccines have also been recently approved for emergency authorization around the world and more than 25 million doses have been administered in 42 countries globally.





phase 3 trial data is still on and important data on vaccine safety and efficacy will be gathered in the next few months. However even in spite of these challenges, there are approved vaccines in India and elsewhere in a record time that can bring normalcy or near normalcy in 2021. Indeed 2021 can be a year where

Out of 1 billion people, India is planning to vaccinate 30 crores of its priority population, which would require one of the largest vaccination drives requiring a vaccination of approximately 10 lakh people per day.

many of these challenges can be overcome by development of accurate diagnostics, surveillance, greater scientific collaborations, streamlined regulatory approvals and speedy vaccine development, all of which can prepare the world for a better and safer future.

[Author's Introduction: Dr. Arindam Mitra is currently a professor in the Department of Microbiology at Adamas University. He holds a doctorate from the University of Maryland at College Park, USA. and worked in the Centre for Infectious Diseases and Vaccinology at the Arizona State University, USA. Dr. Mitra published many peer-reviewed articles in the areas of Vaccine, Infection and Immunity, Clinical Vaccine Immunology among others. He also serves as an editorial board member of Access Microbiology, a cutting-edge research journal from Microbiology Society, UK.]



Sports in the New Normal



**Seasoned Journalist
turned Academic Dr.
Mrityunjoy Chatterjee
deliberates on the
emerging trends in global
sports amid the
pandemic.**



“Sports are more than games, meets and matches,” writes sociologist Jay Coakley in his

book *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*. “They are important aspects of social life that have meanings going far beyond scores and performance statistics.”

Sports will never be the same again. The pandemic has changed the entire spectrum of sports across the world. With some of the much-awaited events of the year including the Tokyo Olympics and Wimbledon Tennis Championships being cancelled or deferred, the global sporting calendar saw its worst disruption since World War II.

Empty stadia, antibody tests, not using



locker rooms, showering only when they get back, no sharing of equipment, no running in the slipstream of others – these are just some things that may become the new normal for sportspersons as they return to training in the Covid-19 environment.

From cricket tours to Premier League football matches, all spectator sports are now being played in empty stadia.

The handshakes and huddles look like things of the past and not likely to return for a long while. The chest and shoulder bumps are suddenly out of fashion. And, the good old hugs a strict no.

On the other hand, fans were starved of live sport, perhaps for the first time in their lives. Media reacted quickly. Sports channels repeated re-runs of old classics. Sports writers reminisced about yesteryear athletes. Sportspersons interviewed fellowmen from all spheres and writers and commentators worked overtime to keep the show ticking.

Live sport, however, had to return. Because at stake were truckloads of money, livelihoods, and millions of fans. It finally did – but in a totally changed form.

Empty Galleries

The stadium experience is totally changed for good. Covid-19 has changed the fate of spectator sports across the world. From cricket tours to Premier League football matches, all spectator sports are now being played in empty stadia.

Contactless

Players are constantly made to wear their masks and sit at least three feet apart in the reserve bench and substitution areas. The player to player contact are being strictly monitored. Gadgets and equipment are being constantly sanitised. On the football field, balls are being delivered through remote sensing vehicles.

Boarding Limitations

Match venues are being chosen close to the hotels where the teams are staying to avoid unnecessary travel. A safety bubble area is being created to ensure a bio-secure environment and maintain health and hygiene standards. Teams are flying in chartered flights to avoid contacting the disease.

Hand in Glove

Players are wearing gloves on the ground, and balls and other gadgets in use are

being regularly disinfected by personnel sporting gloves.

No Spitting

It is a fairly common practice among cricket bowlers to use their spit to shine the ball. Not anymore, though, as the *International Cricket Council* has prohibited that to prevent the transmission of the virus from one player to another. Players in other sports are also being strictly advised to avoid spitting on the ground or playing area.

Alternate Revenue Models

The advertising and sponsorship models for sports leagues have dipped sharply. Sports associations are contemplating introducing diversified means to make money off spectator sports. These include concepts like gamified viewership – which can facilitate live payments for digital assets by, say, unlocking new camera angles, fan commentary or statistical analysis.

Digital Fans and Cheer

Who would have thought that sound effects for laughter and applause, commonly used in sitcoms, will come in handy for live sports? To compensate for the crowds, organisers placed cardboard cut-outs of people, played cheering noises on loudspeakers and installed giant screens showing fans in front of their cameras. The definition of spectator sport changed.

Innovations and Rule Changes

Necessity is the mother of invention and in the case of cricket, the fear of Covid-19 has already started a debate regarding whether it's still appropriate to continue using saliva on the ball. For a game already grappling with fall in attendance figures, cricket could also see more innovations on the lines of T10 leagues or *The 100*. Similarly in other sports, multiple rule changes to avoid contact between players and keeping the fans sitting at home glued to their screens, are sure to bring much more innovation at a faster

Empty stadiums, antibody tests, not using locker rooms, showering only when they get back, no sharing of equipment, no running in the slipstream of others – these are just some things that may become the new normal for sportspersons.

pace. *Rugby Sevens* is another example of such an innovation and more investors would come in and try to create more futuristic sports leagues to attract the public.



Virtual Fans

Many organisation are teaming up with Norwegian company VIZRT to virtualise the audience stands. This offers to-scale animated images of seated fans wearing the colours of their favourite clubs. The virtual images along with the fake cheer are livening up the mood of the players.

Rerun's the New Normal

In the absence of a plethora of new matches, sports broadcasters like ESPN and Fox Sports are playing reruns of old classics across different sports, along with sports documentaries, e-sports games etc. This allows broadcasters to leverage the rise in media consumption during the pandemic as many people find themselves confined to their homes and with more time to kill.

Social Party

As part of its strategy to keep the audience hooked to the sport in the absence of many live games, NBA is "hosting live quarantine parties on social media with current and former players," said the basketball league's COO Mark Tatum, in an interview with the World Economic Forum.

Clause and Effect

A clause called force majeure protects broadcasters' money in the likelihood of unforeseen events that lead to cancellation of a game. While it was always there in sports broadcasting contracts, TV networks and sports associations are taking a deep dive into the nitty gritty of force majeure to safeguard their future interests.

Fan Engagement

The sudden spike in Instagram Live sessions with athletes across sports is already a signal that more such ways of personalized fan-engagement are set to become the norm. While earlier fans had to be mostly dependent on news outlets to get a sneak-peek into their sports stars' lives, the lockdown has ensured that almost every day some or the other

player is coming closer to his followers by interacting with them directly – either via a Q&A session or through online challenges.

Major Emerging Trends

The world today stands at crossroads. The sports industry is pondering questions regarding the future of various sporting events across the world. Though no one can say when the crisis will be over but sports will never be the same.

Here are a few key trends emerging in this field:

Sportspersons Reaching out to Fans Digitally

Earlier, fans depended on news outlets for a glimpse of the lives of the star sportspeople. But now, athletes have themselves started to interact with sports enthusiasts and fans through online challenges, discussions, Q&A sessions. The sudden spike in Instagram Live sessions



The advertising and sponsorship models for sports leagues have dipped sharply.

with sportspeople shows that personalised fan engagement is set to become the norm.

E-Sports and Sports Sponsorships

According to the *Deloitte's* 2019 Digital Media Trends Survey, the global e-sports market is expected to generate \$1.5 billion in annual revenues in 2020 from an estimated worldwide audience of 600 million fans, mainly from advertising and sponsorships.

Some sports companies have started to transform their games into virtual ones. For instance, *MotoGP* has begun to broadcast their virtual races on YouTube, where users can see racers driving their bikes with game controllers.

As the e-sports ecosystem expands, streaming and broadcast sponsorships, including platforms such as YouTube Gaming, Facebook Gaming, and Mixer, will grow tremendously. New branding and sponsorship opportunities will also emerge, especially for brands that organically align with typical gaming behaviours, such as energy drinks and fitness centres.

Other opportunities include a one-stop solution for players and teams to reach larger audiences across many over-the-top (OTT) or streaming engagement channels.

Big Data and Technology Dominance

The high frequency of competitive events meant that players had to analyze quickly.

In the last two decades, Big Data technology has been developed to provide useful information to monitor for and control internal and external factors. For example, wearable devices and video analytics are being used to collect data from players and events to help the teams strategize.

Advent of Fantasy Sports

Use of data analysis has been big in fantasy sports to boost their business and take significant strides with minimum

In the last two decades, Big Data technology has been developed to provide useful information to monitor for and control internal and external factors.



resources. For example, data on user behaviour has helped brands to showcase personalised tournaments.

Engaging Online Content

Today, just creating a sports fantasy platform with a great user experience is not enough. Audience engagement is critical.

In 2019, Yannick Colaco, Founder of *FanCode* (an ad-free sports aggregator platform by Dream11), was quoted as saying, "A comprehensive multi-sports content platform that provides in-game analysis, and live match scores is the need of the hour. Sports content platforms will be driving the next wave of growth in sports consumption."

This highlights the importance of having engaging content on online sports platforms. But what kind of 'content'? A content bucket for an online sports platform may ideally include prediction articles, preview articles, viral content and match reports.

Therefore, sports marketing aspirants need



to gear up for technology literacy, online marketing and cultural knowledge to meet the challenges created by this pandemic.

Sports Icons on the New Normal

Sachin Tendulkar: "No doubt the world is going through the biggest challenge in our lifetime. I think players will be wary for some time when it comes to using saliva (to shine the ball). It will play on their minds. High fives and hugging your teammates will be avoided for some time. This is what I would like to believe. They will be conscious to begin with and may maintain social distancing".

M C Mary Kom: "We are all hoping and praying desperately for things to go back to normal but can they ever? Of course not. This virus is an enemy that no one even understands completely. Sports will change. Mine is a contact sport and I am personally worried how we are going to deal with it".

Bhaichung Bhutia: "In today's age, when television and digital platforms have become so important part of our lives, I don't think the lack of spectators in stadiums will have much of a bearing as far as business is concerned. I see the TV and digital gaining from this. Sports events will gradually come back to what they were before. They can be held behind closed doors for now".

Mahesh Bhupathi: "Sport won't change. Things will be normal once Covid-19 goes

away".

Sardar Singh: "From the point of view of Olympic preparations, the plus point is the team will get more time to prepare for Olympics but the negative is it will have to revisit its plans. Once sports resume, social distancing is going to be the new norm and it remains to be seen how it is implemented in contact sports like boxing, wrestling or for that matter hockey and football where close tackles and body contact are common".

Abhinav Bindra: "Sport is a tool that unites people and brings joy to thousands of participants and viewers across the world. While aspects of heightened safety protocols will be integrated for the foreseeable future, the want and attraction of sport will not diminish. As the general people have become more conscious of their health and their physical well-being, avenues to use sport to improve fitness will grow. The post-Covid-19 world could be a blessing in disguise for India. There may not be so much foreign exposure and this may allow India to build proper sporting infrastructure".

Bajrang Punia: "Wrestling is a contact sport. When wrestling will resume, there is no way you can avoid physical contact. But I don't think there would be any hesitation. I don't see any change happening. The only thing that can happen is that the sport will become more intense. All of us are analysing our weaknesses and strengths, so when tournaments will resume, the competition will be intense".

[Author's Introduction: Journalist turned Academic administrator, Dr. Mrityunjay Chatterjee has over 35 years of experience in mainstream Media and Education industries. Widely travelled, he has held coveted positions across Media and Academia. Mrityunjay is presently the Dean, School of Liberal Arts & Culture Studies, Adamas University.]



Bengali Literature in the Time of Coronavirus



***Renowned litterateur
Saikat Mukhopadhyay
talks about the plight of
Bengali literature in the
wake of the Covid-19
pandemic.***

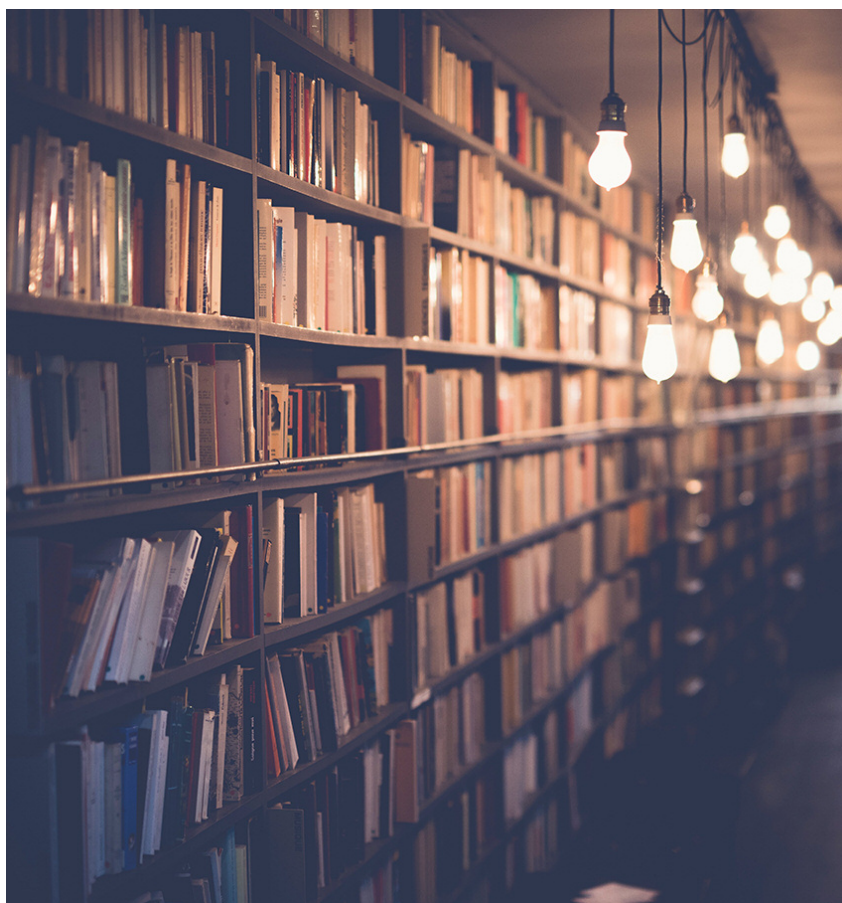
Since the outbreak of Covid-19 and the subsequent imposition of lockdown, I am watching the arena of Bengali literature with great concern.

It is the concern of a grasshopper who detects a forest-fire advancing across the grassland. It is the concern of a polar bear standing before a receding snow cap.... baffled. Yes, just as a grasshopper belongs to the grass field, or a polar bear to the arctic glaciers, I belong to this world of Bengali books. It is not my livelihood. It is my life.

The question, which was tormenting me since the month of March 2020, is whether our beloved book-industry would survive the blow of lockdown. And now, after the passage of eight more months, I conclude that ... well the conclusion

should be drawn at the end. Before that, let me state my understanding of the present situation of the book market. The rotation of three different gear-wheels makes the engine of our book industry throb. These three wheels are closely interlocked. Firstly, the consumers or readers. Secondly the producer or publishers. And thirdly the authors, who may be called the suppliers of raw materials. It is always the members of middle-class gentry, who form the major part

The question, which was tormenting me since the month of March 2020, is whether our beloved book-industry would survive the blow of lockdown.



of our readership. Most of them are salaried people like the clerics of private or public sector and the teachers. The reason is simple. They have education, they have modest provision and above all their fixed working hours leave them with free time, which they can devote to the luxury of reading. The poor has no money to buy the books and the rich has no time to read. A quick glance at the crowd of any book fair will prove my contention. You may come across an industrialist on the dais of some seminar there but hardly will you see one rummaging through the books in a stall. Till now, the book fairs and book markets are the domains of the middle-class *Dada* and *Boudi*.

I am not forgetting those bright, young people from our I.T. Sector, who are also passionate readers. It is heartening to see that many of them are fond of reading books in their mother tongue; I mean books written in Bengali. Now it appears from different surveys and statistics presented by the media that the salaried people of organized sectors are least hurt by the

lockdown, at least in monetary terms. They were drawing their salary more or less on the same scale during the lockdown and now at this stage of gradual unlocking, their fear of losing job is over. On the other hand, during the lockdown, they suddenly found a plenty of time at their disposal. The experience was not a happy one. There were long hours of idle confinement akin to house-arrest. The problem was how to overcome the boredom and the ensuing fit of depression. How to escape the ominous brooding about Corona-death. And their habit of reading books came to their rescue.

So, they continued to buy books during the lockdown in the same spree, if not more. (Boys and girls from the I.T. Sector are excluded from this category. Though they are also confined at home but they have no respite from work, courtesy phone calls, webinar, laptop and network). The picture is not entirely so rosy though. In the pre-Covid-19 era, there was another buying-class comprising of students and quasi-employed youths. They



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used to spend a portion of their hard-earned money for buying books. No, not the text-books; I am discussing about literature. The sum total of business those non-descript buyers used to give cannot be ignored. But, how they will fare now?

For getting an answer to this query, let us briefly recollect our own childhood days. Remember, as a child or as a young-adolescent, we had to depend on the generosity of our elders for a book or a magazine of our choice.



As unemployed youth, we had to save from the meagre amount we earned from giving tuitions. But at present, the daughter of a hapless shopkeeper who

has lost his business or an undergraduate student who himself has lost his job of giving tuition to the school children, will not be able to buy books any more.

One thing is certain though – the death of the migrant-labourers, sudden disappearance of an elderly neighbour from his balcony or disposal of cadavers wrapped in black packets are not finding places in our lockdown literature.

Consequently, the book-market loses business. As a whole, the first wheel of our engine is still in its place, though screeching pathetically under strain. How badly hit are our publishers? Horribly indeed. The middle and small publishers and booksellers of College Street are literally facing the specter of starvation. We are discussing about retailers who earn their living from daily sale of books to the shop-owners of mofussil towns and villages. Anybody who has ever walked through the area called *Boi Para* in pre-Covid-19 period, must be familiar with the sight of shabbily dressed buyers from small towns and villages, with huge jute bags folded under their arms. They used to gather around almirah stalls situated in front of Sanskrit College or tucked within other narrow lanes and by lanes of *Boi Para*. They used to read out the names of the books from their purchase list at the top of their voice. The whole area used to reverberate with such trade calls. Then, suddenly the black magic of Covid-19 made all those gentlemen from

distant towns vanish from the market. Actually, the complete shutdown of the transport-sector, particularly of train service and the protocols of social-distancing cut off the life-line of book market. Now, with gradual unlocking, the market is slowly returning to its old self, apparently. But none of us know how long it will take to heal the wound. There are a few silver-linings also. Some of the big publishers of College Street, in desperate effort for survival, have shaken off their proverbial inertia. At last they have started to publish e-books and e-magazines which was a long-standing demand of the readers belonging to Gen X. Though e-commerce at College Street is still in its germinating stage, we can hope it will take the air soon. This is a change for the betterment, which will stay with us even after the memory of Covid-19 fades out. Many potential buyers are still (rightly) afraid of the gathering at the book market and for them, the enterprising publishers have started online marketing. Books, which are being ordered

It is always the members of middle-class gentry, who form the major part of our readership.

by the customers through e-mail/ phone/ WhatsApp, are being delivered to their doorsteps by the publishers/ book-sellers through cycle messengers. This timely step is not only bailing out the book industry to

some extent but has also created job-opportunity for many young boys and girls as delivery persons. So, the second wheel is badly affected but still holds the place. Only some generous grant from the authorities to



the struggling publishers and book-sellers can save the situation, I think. And what about the author – the last of our interlinked wheels? This is a question which belongs more to the field of aesthetics than economics. How the psyche of an author is affected by this pandemic situation? Do her recent writings reflect the images of her agony? Has the imagery of her poetry turned bleaker? Has the content of her story turned less sublime? In a nutshell, what has she created during the last eight or nine months? What is the nature of our lockdown-literature? Well, we have reasons to believe that during this dark hour, fewer books are written for the young readers. What may be the reason of such paucity of publication? The young ones cannot browse through the e-catalogue of books may be the one. They have to touch the books with their hands and see the colourful pictures. They have to stand wide-eyed before book stalls physically and nag their parents for buying the book of their choice. This is not possible now and my heart bleeds for the young ones. There are more and more adult-titles dedicated to ghost, horror, macabre, crime et al. Again, what may be the reason? Do we badly want to escape from the reality? I mean, does the author find his immediate surrounding devoid of all romance and hope? May be! I cannot

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say for certain. One thing is certain though – the death of the migrant-labourers, sudden disappearance of an elderly neighbour from his balcony or disposal of cadavers wrapped in black packets are not finding places in our lockdown literature. The psyche of an author has clearly denied that honour to the agents of death. Rather she has devoted her pages to the eternal elements. And I say she has done the right thing. After all which sane author would want to make the death immortal through her writing?

[Author's Introduction: Saikat Mukhopadhyay, a renowned author of Bengali literature, was born in the year 1963. He did his masters in English Literature from Calcutta University and presently is working under West Bengal Revenue Service in the capacity of Joint Commissioner. Shri Mukhopadhyay is writing stories and novels for both adults and young adults. His works appear regularly in all the major literary magazines of West Bengal. He has more than twenty-five titles to his credit so far.]



AI in Health Sector: Immense Possibilities



*Researcher-cum-academic **Dr. Manoj Kumar Singh** deliberates on the implications of AI in the health sector.*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a tool that involves machines with similar intelligence as a human being, to perform various tasks given by a human, like facial recognition for identification of individuals or voice recognition on virtual assistance. AI-enabled platforms like Alexa and Siri are now becoming our assistants. Driverless vehicles or self-driving cars are also being designed to assist elderly or blind passengers. Being less prone to error and much faster than human, their role in healthcare is commendable.

- **Machine learning (ML)**, a division of AI, considered to categorize patterns, uses algorithms and information to provide automated insight to healthcare providers. AI uses advanced algorithms to 'learn' characters from a big section of healthcare data. Moreover, it can be equipped with the knowledge and self-correcting abilities to further improve its



effectiveness based on feedback. AI and robotics are becoming a part of our healthcare system.

- **Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs)** are non-linear relationships between input variables and output based on the function of the human brain.
- **Deep learning (DL)** is a further extension of the classical neural network methods which is capable of learning to analyze more interlinking non-linear structures in the information without human supervision.

Some of the important applications of AI in healthcare are:

AI-Assisted Medical Diagnosis

AI can improve the process of taking care of patients with chronic diseases and recommend specific interventions for complicated diseases and thus reducing both time and error. For example, Tencent, a Chinese company has already started early-stage screening of oesophageal cancer for pre-clinical testing with an accuracy of 90 per cent.

Robot-Assisted Surgery

Robotic technologies do not substitute the surgeons but rather compliment them.



They are operated by the surgeon; hence they are described as 'master-slave systems' which consists of the master console, representing a three dimensional representation of the operating area and the slave unit, having robotic system which operates on the patients as per the surgeon's instructions with a far superior precision. Such surgeries minimise blood loss and scar formation and reduce post-operative recovery time.

Virtual Nursing

Virtual nursing assistants support patients in hospitals during illness and post-operative care. *iCare Navigator*, a sophisticated AI system can constantly track and examine the patient's response, attitude, receptivity, sensitivity, to provide fully customized patient experiences. AI aims to speed-up clinical decision-making procedures as it can quickly interpret huge data collected throughout the healthcare system, including patient records and guidance systems. AI and ML is generally applied in three major healthcare areas: (a) ML in the field of drug discovery; (b) neural networks and optimization strategies in image diagnosis for quick inferences and (c) deep-learning methods in genomic and

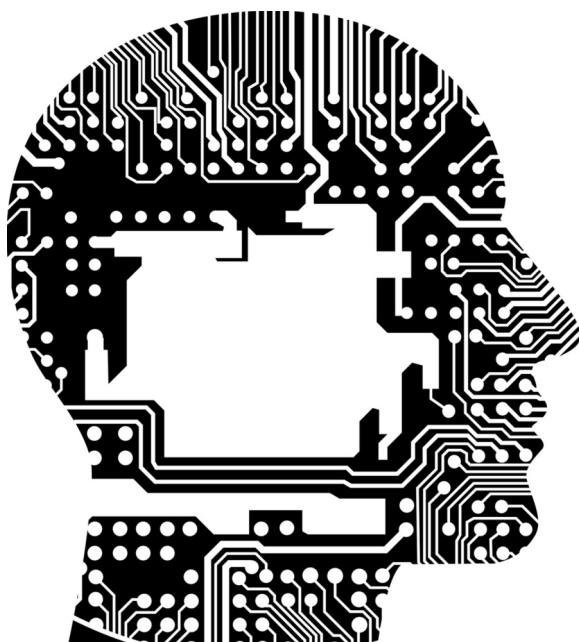
It is a myth that AI and ML are going to take away jobs. Rather, it is opening new avenues for experts in interdisciplinary fields of AI, ML and health sciences.



clinical data to identify newer predictive models.

Fraud Detection

Thousands of medical claims are managed by a few auditors and hence they are unable to pay much attention to the comprehensive picture of the fraud, if any. The process is time taking and inefficient. AI and ML can analyse the data, derive valuable information and establish specific models and classify a

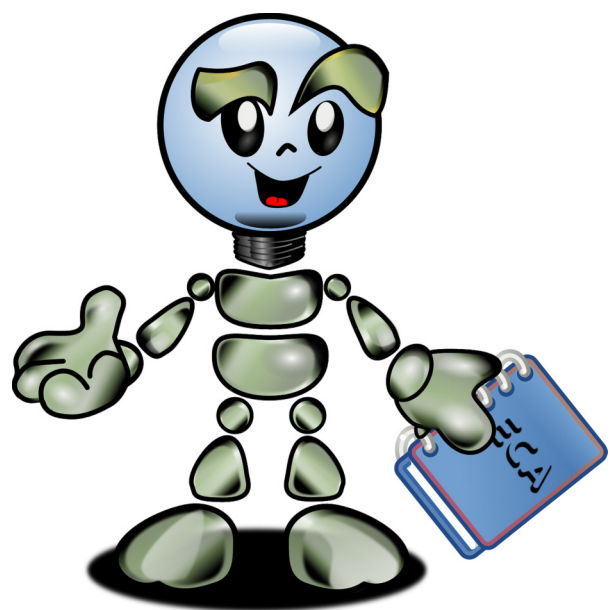


AI and ML are having significant applications in managing Covid-19 such as data mining, diagnosis, fever detection, virtual healthcare assistance, face recognition, drug discovery, robotics, cytometry, mobile based surveys etc.

case for further review and inspection of fraud and abuse.

AI Application in Stroke

More than 140,000 people die each year from stroke in the US alone. Many deaths can be avoided if people get early diagnosis and proper prediction. Hence, studies on stroke prevention and care are significant. AI methods have been used in key fields of stroke care like early disease prediction, diagnosis and treatment. AI





model can predict which individuals are more likely to go through a heart attack and/ or stroke.

Artificial Neurons

To restore damage sustained by neurodegenerative diseases, researchers have created artificial neurons in the form of silicon-based miniature chips, that can repair the nervous circuit's key functions.

AI in COVID-19 Pandemic; Recent Applications

AI and ML are having significant applications in managing Covid-19 such as data mining, diagnosis, fever

detection, virtual healthcare assistance, face recognition, drug discovery, robotics, cytometry, mobile based surveys etc.

AI has been used to predict if a patient will display SARS-Cov-2 symptoms later or not, particularly in senior citizens by analysing different biochemical parameters. AI-based CT scan can diagnose within 10 seconds and are employed to reduce the workload on physicians. AI enabled immunoinformatic studies are becoming vital in minimizing the time in developing vaccine.

AI systems have significantly elevated Covid-19 awareness among people. Haptik Developed WhatsApp Chatbot, MyGov Corona Helpdesk for the Government of India where one can get Covid-19 information by just typing "Hi". It is a myth that AI and ML are going to take away jobs. Rather, it is opening new avenues for experts in interdisciplinary fields of AI, ML and health sciences. AI can radically reduce the time for surgeries and diagnosis. More remedies for critical diseases will be possible as doctors/ researchers will be able to devote more time in research and innovation.

[Author's Introduction: Dr. Manoj Kumar Singh is currently an Assistant Professor at the Kolkata-based Adamas University. Prior to his current stint, he was associated as a post-doctoral research associate in a CSIR project at the University of Kalyani. He has several publications to his credit. A GATE-qualified scholar, Dr. Singh completed his Ph.D. from CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Biology in Kolkata.]



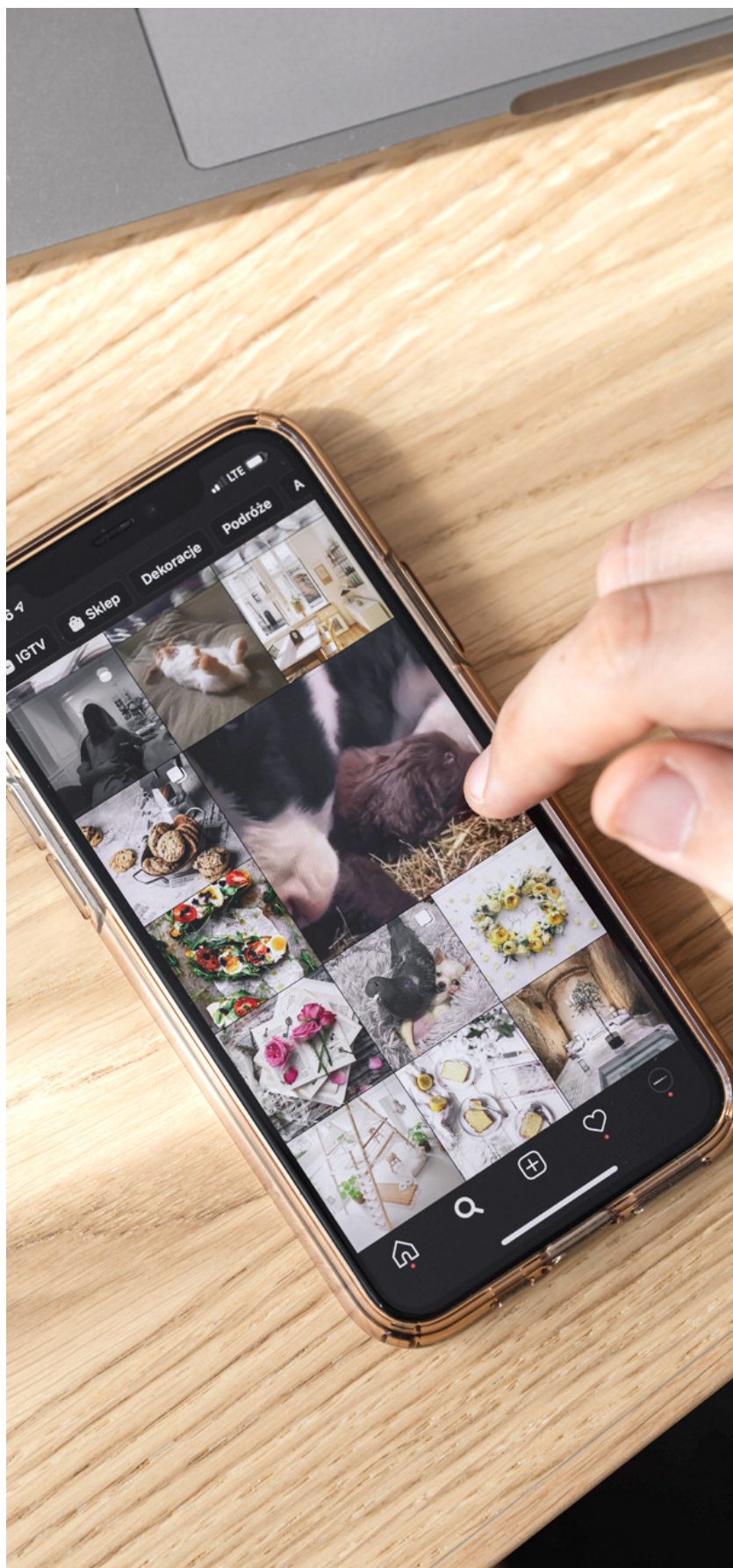
Big Screen Picture?



**Filmmaker and producer
Cyrus Dastur writes an
incisive piece on OTT
platforms and where they
are headed.**

Cinema matlab bada parda! That's one thing we've grown up knowing. Doesn't matter if all of us have seen more films on TV or now Mobile phone screen than in Cinema halls. There's undeniably some magic that comes alive when you see any damn film on the big screen. The larger than life images, the Dolby sound experience, the whole thrill of dressing up and going to the theatres. That's what makes watching movies so exciting.

Even when multiplexes started replacing Single screens, the experience changed but the magic remained intact. Slowly but surely, the whole experience started becoming expensive and reached a point where it became virtually impossible for the lower middle class to go to the new-age cinema halls for a family viewing. After all, spending 2,000 bucks on a film that's not even exciting wasn't really the best weekend plan. So when the OTTs came in, it seemed like the game was set to change. After all, you not just had the Indian blockbusters and latest films at your fingertips at virtually no cost but also access to the best shows, Hollywood fare and world Cinema at your command. And all this for a pittance! In fact Amazon offers it for virtually free as part of their marketing strategy. But then came Covid-19.



The pandemic not just changed the world but the entire business of Cinema! Traditionally, for the longest time, a Movie would ideally release in a Cinema hall and then find its way on DVDs, OTTs, Satellite channels, etc. But all that was suddenly history. Movies now released straight on OTTs literally threatening the very model of theatre business. Doesn't matter if the big screen experience might soon (hopefully not) become passé. Maybe it's a romance that the older generation associates with. For a generation that may never really know the joy or the experience of going to a cinema hall wouldn't really care.

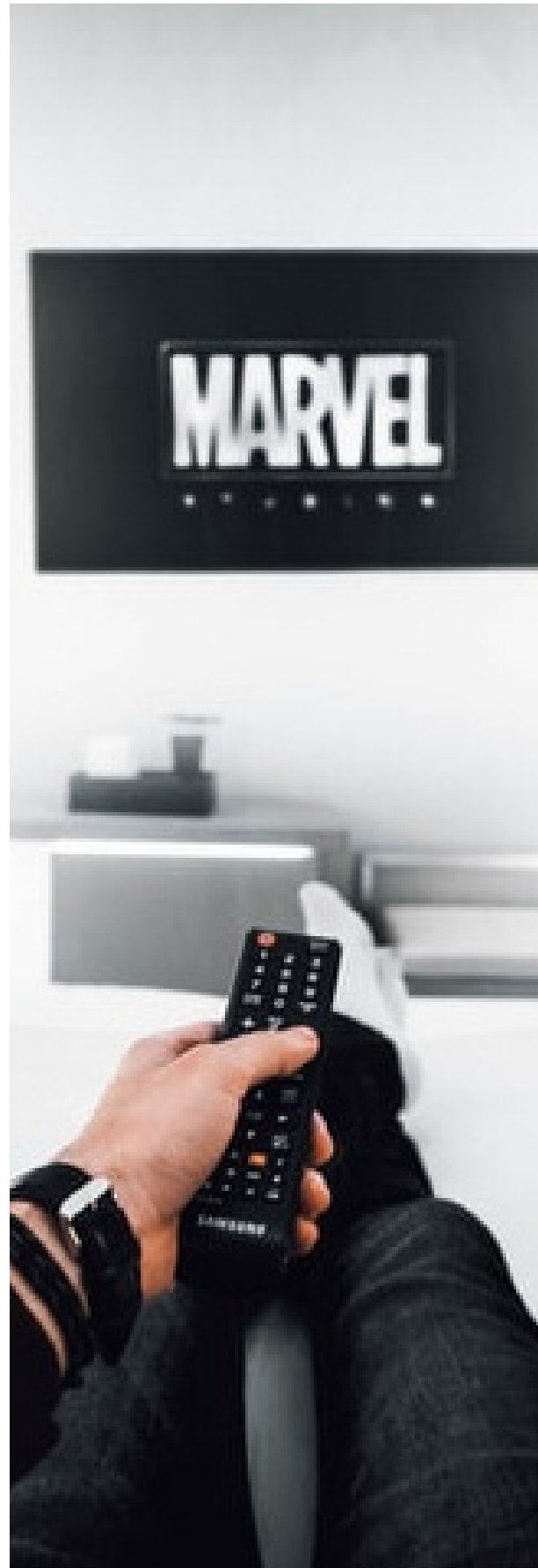
The filmmakers and actors too were having fun at the party. Since the major OTT players primarily work only with big names (with the small names hardly getting a chance), the producers were saved of the pain and embarrassment of releasing their films at the Box Office and testing their content. Since there is almost no 'tangible' way of knowing how your content has been appreciated except for reactions on Social Media (which is often 'managed'), the

Since the major OTT players primarily work only with big names (with the small names hardly getting a chance), the producers were saved of the pain and embarrassment of releasing their films at the Box Office and testing their content.

Producers continued to live in their aura. The last six months has seen a point where big feature films have been sold to OTTs at illogical prices that perhaps have no justification. But with reputations overriding talent and merit, there was no way of questioning anybody.

But life can be strange and parties do come to an end. Over hyped big-ticket films released on OTTs started collapsing with very bad feedback. 'Gulabo Sitabo' and 'Sadak 2' stood out and took the flak. The turning point came with the bombing of Akshay Kumar starrer 'Laxmii' that was supposed to be the big-ticket Diwali release and was supposed to ramp up numbers for the *Disney Hotstar* OTT platform. The guys apparently paid a whooping, insane 170 crores to acquire the film thinking it would be a game changer. All this WITHOUT even seeing the film!

Apparently, the top guys at the leading OTTs are an 'enlightened' lot now with all of them insisting they'd want to see the film and only then decide. Apparently the moneys paid for acquisition will be a lot more sensible. And apparently, the maths will be worked out keeping in mind how many new subscriptions the film gets for the platform. Whether this happens or simply remains a temporary



enlightenment remains to be seen. But what this does signify is that people will now begin to question the money being senselessly splurged on acquisition of films. *Netflix*, *Amazon* and *Disney* have huge pockets and can afford to splurge but in a slowing economy with returns being tough, one will have to take into account the logic of over spend. What this also means is that viewership habits might be in for a paradigm shift. While going to the movies has always been about experiencing a feature film in a Movie theatre with a community of movie goers, this might just be the new age we've entered sooner than expected. Will movies continue to release in cinemas? Absolutely yes. But those will perhaps be far and few – only the extravaganzas that deserve a big screen release like a James Bond film or *Avengers*. These are films made for the big screen and no large TV screen can match that experience. But that's just 20

Most feature films today are nice stories with unglamorous faces that can easily be seen on a small screen at your own time.

per cent to 30 per cent of the films in the current scenario.

Most feature films today are nice stories with unglamorous faces that can easily be seen on a small screen at your own time. Let's face it, much as we love the new talent, most people will just not make the effort of going to a Cinema hall and spend thousands of rupees to watch





them. That's a fact we can't deny. There will always be a certain section wanting to go and root for smaller, independent films but that may not be enough to cover the costs of releasing it on the big screen. This is a business after all and the economics do come into play, sometimes overriding passion. Films worked very well on the big screen in

One of the reasons for the runaway success of OTT platforms in India is that most audiences had never seen such free-flowing content before.

the 60s and 70s because that was a very different era. Ticket prices were cheap, life was simple and there were very few other options for entertainment in India. There's a very good chance that had a Jeetendra or Rajendra Kumar or even an Amitabh Bachchan been there in today's era they wouldn't have worked on the big screen because they would never have got so many chances after chances to showcase their talent.

OTTs however have been plagued with problems of their own in India off late. With the government tightening laws and perhaps wanting to keep an eye on the content, the free run might after all be over. One of the reasons for the runaway success of this medium in India is that most audiences had never seen such free-flowing content before. For a country where most people have been brought up in a controlled, restricted environment, a film or a show where sex, violence and swear words were free flowing was very



liberating. This was something most people had never seen before in their own language. And with OTTs being uncensored, the party went on without any real checks and balances. If the government does walk the talk, it could seriously affect viewership numbers because then this would be the same kind of content they get to see on TV or films and the novelty factor is over. How much damage is something only time will

If the government does walk the talk, it could seriously affect viewership numbers because then this would be the same kind of content they get to see on TV or films and the novelty factor is over.

tell. But one thing is for sure that the free run might be coming to an end. No longer can filmmakers treat OTTs as a dumping ground for substandard films at sky high prices. And no longer can OTTs get away with unchecked content. The recent Netflix controversy about a kissing scene in 'A Suitable Boy' is a small proof of the things to come. After all, things do seem to have changed a lot after Covid-19.

[Author's Introduction: Cyrus Dastur is a name synonymous with the Short Film space in India having virtually kickstarted it almost a decade back. The Founder of SHAMIANA – Asia's Largest Short Film Company, Cyrus is also a respected Producer having produced a Bollywood feature film, a TV series and has successfully produced two Musical productions – 'Strangers in the Night' and 'The Name's Bond'.]



Judicial Reforms and Ease of Remote Justice Delivery

Nationally renowned legal professional and educationist Dr. Jyotsna Yagnik writes about the distinct advantages of remote justice delivery in a country like India.

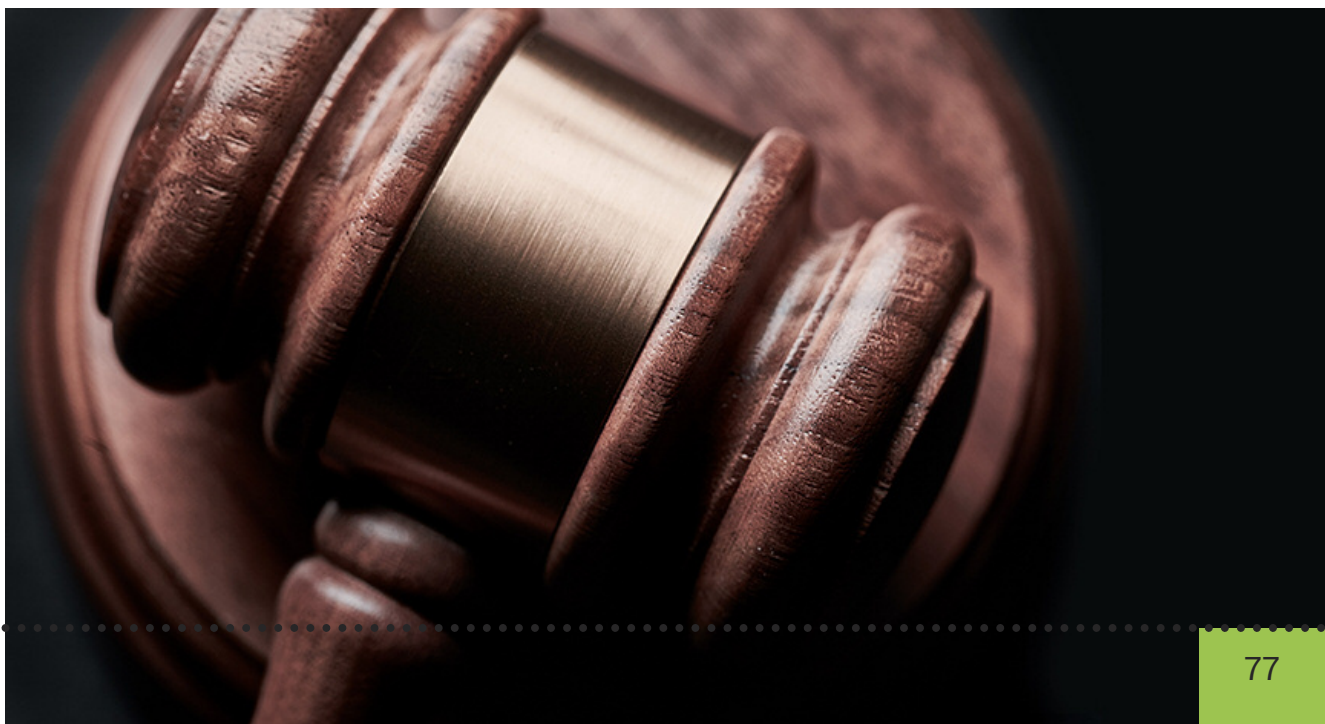


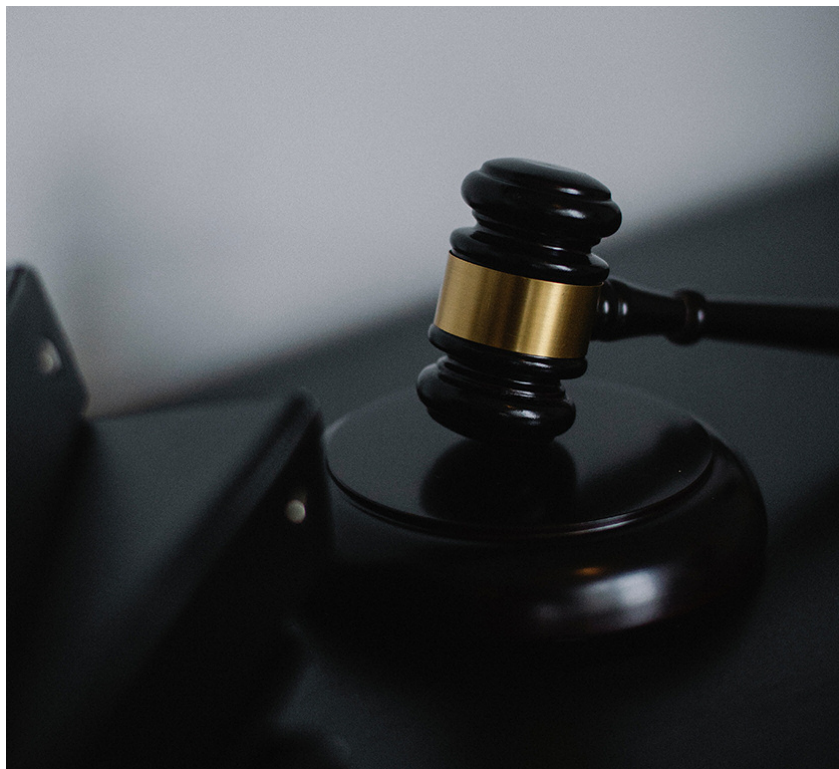
Covid-19 has taken away many precious moments of our life. It has left unrecoverable marks on our minds, affected our health, occupation, economic system, our justice delivery system and so on and so forth. It has also given us many new things which were absolutely unknown before. It has strengthened human relationships and brought us closer to our families. It has also diverted many of us from blindly hankering after wealth. Judicial reforms, being done all over the world, is neither a new concept nor a new

phrase coined by the emergence of Covid-19. Judicial reforms are going on in India for decades together to strengthen the rule of law, to beat the unbeatable delay in disposal of long pending cases, to inject alternative dispute resolutions like mediation and conciliation, to give speedy and effective justice and to shorten the technical and hazardous procedure.

Remote justice delivery has been introduced during the last two decades but its use in India has been extremely limited right from its inception. Video conferencing is a well-known means for it. In criminal procedure code, the state is empowered to decide that certain kinds of accused would not be taken outside the jail if law and order situation so demands.

The facility to conduct the criminal trial remotely while keeping the accused on video conferencing has not been freely used. It has not been made the normal rule. The mandatory physical presence of the accused inside the court house while





conducting the trial against the respective accused has been rigorously continued as a rule and as a result the conduct of the trial through video conferencing has been a rarity.

Huge expenditure for the physical presence of the witnesses in the courts could have been saved by using video conferencing to record testimony of the witnesses. Even for witnesses who stay far away, video conferencing has been a rare practice.

It is now high time to effectively develop and strengthen the new and much needed concept

of remote justice delivery system as a regular and routine practice. The time consumed in reaching the court needs to be constructively used for those cases where physical presence of the accused or witness has no alternative.

Covid-19 has created a society where physical distancing is a must. Hence, wisdom demands that we find out intellectual options for all those situations where assembly of many human beings can be avoided. Court is one place where multiple parties assemble. Hence, the chances of spread of Covid-19 increase

dangerously. At present, under the compulsions created by Covid-19, almost all courts in the world are working remotely. However, in the proceedings conducted by the courts the concept of justice and fairness haven't at all been compromised. It is required to note that where the court is required to note the demeanour of the witnesses, where cross examination of the witnesses is required, where direct and physical supervision of the court is required and where record is tremendously bulky; it has been constantly felt by all concerned that

Remote justice delivery has been introduced during the last two decades but its use in India has been extremely limited right from its inception.

We can keep hope and confidence that the start of virtual hearing will continue and will become a rule in near future.

physical proceedings has no option. Other than such cases, the current system of virtual hearing of the court cases can be termed to be the most suitable to the present circumstances – time saving, informal but speedy and suitable to the need of maintaining physical distancing and duly cognizant of public health.

The cases where the hearing of the respective case is between the Judge and an advocate of the party, the procedure of virtual hearing needs to be continued even after we come out of the calamity of Covid-19.

The continuance of virtual hearing can sort out the biggest challenge of lack of space in the courthouses – the space needed for the sitting of lawyers, the space needed for the victim or witness protection etc. In our present setup of the family courts, children are not given due importance unlike foreign countries. Deserted mothers do not find any option but to bring their children in the court in cases of family dispute. Hence, the children of the couples whose dispute is being heard by the court become the biggest victim of the adverse

family circumstances. Their mental health, progress, carrier growth etc. suffer the most as they are required to witness the agony of their parents and also to undergo the agony themselves. In case of virtual hearings, the sufferings of such children will be minimum, which will be a positive sign for the growth, progress and careers of such unfortunate children. In my opinion, except where the testimony of either party is needed or where the case property requires to be seen, identified and verified or where identification of the parties and more





particularly the accused and/ or the property involved in the case etc. needed; all other cases and more particularly miscellaneous applications like injunction application, bail applications, return of the case property, appointment of the guardian, deciding routine matters related to custody of the children, routine matters related to maintenance of wife, children and parents should be conducted through virtual hearings only. In case of civil cases, where mediation or conciliation is to be done or in the matters of conduct of the arbitration claim, recording of the settlement or declaring the suit based on

settlement or pronouncing of judgement etc. are concerned, virtual hearing is the most suitable process which should be made a permanent part of civil and criminal justice delivery system. A developing country like India needs to encourage virtual hearing as much as possible. It is felt that there are certain difficulties that arise from lack of face-to-face contact or participation of parties – issues related to confidentiality, privacy, understanding of the process, eye contact, reading of the body language, lack of chance to the parties to instruct the respective lawyers, inability to witness the proceedings

for non-availability of Wi-Fi facilities. Such issues can shake the faith of the common man in the justice delivery system. However, we cannot afford to be a country, which would be afraid of teething troubles. India is known for its ability to find out solutions. We can keep hope and confidence that the start of virtual hearing will continue and will become a rule in near future. It will surely help our fellow citizens to attain the very goal of justice delivery, the system of 'Access of Justice to All' by delivering speedy, effective and meaningful justice.

[Author's Introduction: Currently the Pro Vice Chancellor and the Dean of the School of Law and Justice at the Kolkata-based Adamas University, Dr. Jyotsna Yagnik is a Former Principal Judge at City Civil Courts in Ahmedabad. Dr. Jyotsna Yagnik has been teaching Law and imparting training to senior officers for about 33 years. She is the Former Principal of Law College and the Former Director of Yagnik Law Academy that coaches for judiciary examinations.]



Web and Mobile-Led Journalism of Tomorrow

Educationist

M Sushovan writes a nuanced piece on some of the significant future trends in journalism.

For sure, nobody reading this article needs to have an intro on 'Web and Mobile-Based Journalism', especially when the handsets – perennially abuzz with single-tune news alerts – never let us forget their presence. We pay heed to it or not, always there's news waiting to be explored at our fingertips. What started as twice-a-day pushed SMS and MMS alerts sent by a handful of news outlets (mostly in the developed economy, like the BBC or some newspapers of China) in the early 2000s

have become today's 24x7 deluge of updates from online and mobile platforms. An unimaginable number of news sources are vying for grabbing our eyeballs in the virtual news space spread across global, national, provincial, local and hyperlocal arenas. Paid or unpaid, this news flow is here to stay.

Mobile traffic has taken a giant leap of 222 per cent in the last 7 years, according to a *Broadbandsearch.net* survey released in 2019. The world's highest smartphone penetration witnessed in Indonesia where mobile devices account for 90 per cent of digital minutes. Imagine, what the current stats would now be considering the global over-dependence on online activities owing to Covid-19 pandemic plaguing all parts of the globe.

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling is everywhere – in websites, social media, online hangouts,

all sorts of communication gadgets, offices, roads, movie theatres and even inside cars. It is direct, easy-to-make, easier to grasp and penetrating like never before. This neo-journalistic approach is akin to multimedia news presentation, which requires a multimedia mindset of combining news text, audio, video, graphics and still photographs. Here, traditional journalism paves the way for the unconventionally easier way of presenting news.

Liberation from Newsroom

An irrepressible spread of smartphone among the masses has been the real gamechanger for journalism as it has made 'news of the move' a reality. In other words, it is a kind of liberation from the newsroom, so far regarded as the sanctum sanctorum of journalism. The day laptops, tablets and smartphones had become important tools of news gathering, media giants didn't wait much to transform themselves as 'mobile' news makers. Satellite trucks fitted with gigantic umbrella-like transmitters were replaced by cheaper as well as lighter mobile handsets. Media outlets went for sustainable and fast technology to disseminate information rather than rooting for quality and cautious editing practices. Faster Internet, wireless

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broadband, software and various live-streaming apps made life easier for small media outfits operating from even a bylane near you.

Quality vs Quantity

People getting minute-by-minute news tickers or updates are a little bothered about the quality of news, forget the standard of language. Quite practically, companies mushrooming in the news business are in search of the real “mission” grabbing the advertisement pie, while the vision gets blurred by all sorts of non-news pursuits. Digital news start-ups are giving a new meaning to ‘value for money’ keeping a little or no eye for details while venerable media houses are struggling to hold their fort.

Latest communication gadgets along with broadband wireless Internet facilities and artificial-intelligence (AI) in mobile apps are creating a huge digital divide among the media itself. Both news gathering and news packaging have found a new dimension, thanks to the surge in mobile economy. But, the discerning and credible media preferences of a person's daily news diet have now been replaced by the smaller and unassuming social networking platforms, niche blogs, news aggregators and even WhatsApp groups. The





periphery of news sources has become wide but credibility and quality take a backseat.

Fake news comprising fraudulent content has an ability to travel as much as, and in some cases, even more than, authentic news. A recent analysis says that a 'fake news' happens effectively when a deliberate lie is lifted by dozens of other blogs, retransmitted and hurriedly edited across websites, cross-posted at the thousands of online hangouts and gobbled by lakhs of web and mobile consumers.

Centralised Newsroom

Wide dividers among print, audio-visual and online news desks which used to be separate watertight compartments are blurring. Web and mobile technologies are bringing in an integrated newsroom structure where a media-neutral news presentation approach is followed.

Enter centralised and integrated newsroom, where any news is written with an omni-channel formula – a single line ticker for TV channels, two-sentence update on Twitter, one paragraph for a Facebook page post and a 500-word

A joint study by the University of Michigan and Facebook has suggested that individuals' own choices drive algorithmic filtering, picking the right exposure within a range of content.

story for a print media publication. So, a budding journalist belonging to this mobile generation has no choice except becoming an omni-channel news executive.

MoJo Is In

MoJo or Mobile Journalism is here and adopted by almost every small as well as big media houses dealing in audio-visual production, wherein high-end smartphones have replaced movie cameras. The reason: fast and cheaper production. Absence of big movie cameras means ease in logistics- maintenance- manpower costs and no production house would be unhappy to avail an opportunity for cutting cost. Research outfit Quoracreative recently found that globally, around 62 per cent of the users searched the Internet on their mobile phones in 2020 while average smartphone users were glued to their

An irrepressible spread of smartphone among the masses has been the real gamechanger for journalism as it has made 'news of the move' a reality.

handsets for four hours a day. The current 30 exabytes-per-month global mobile data traffic is all set to peak 77.5 exabytes per month by 2022. Globally, half of the web traffic transports via mobile devices. And, India has become the highest



Despite all the positive stats, revenue is hard to come by for web and online platforms.



mobile-first online population, which access 73.67 per cent of web pages through their mobile phones.

Meanwhile, the total number of smartphone users is reaching 2.87 billion by the end of this year. Quite naturally, blocking ads for mobile media is jumping 90 per cent YoY.

But will that be enough?

Revenue Cry

Despite all the positive stats, revenue is hard to come by for web and online platforms. Barring one or two, each online

news outlet – web or mobile – is fighting for sustenance or reaching a breakeven point, forget making profit in India. The common notion of free web is killing all sorts of revenue models propagated by the news start-ups. Pay-per-view, paywall, monthly/ annual subscription, advertising, freemium, e-commerce, crowd funding, licensing, data sales, sponsorship and donation – nothing seems to be working here. However, crowdfunding projects have picked up well and grown in number.

Big Data: The Future?

Big data analytics is here, and media outlets are using its full potential picking individual media consumer's interest and pushing preferred advertisements, including political ones, on the panels of the desktop-laptop-mobile screens irrespective of the content the reader is consuming. Thus the digital advertisement and advertising revenue market has grown exponentially from a tiny baby to a full-grown adult in 2020. In the US and some other developed countries, this segment has even pipped all the conventional revenue platforms. Most media companies across the world are weighing new formats and technologies of journalism and experimenting with e-platforms like virtual reality or gaming. A joint study by the University of Michigan and Facebook has suggested that individuals' own choices drive algorithmic filtering, picking the right exposure within a range of content.

Wait for the personalised media to stage.

[Author's Introduction: M Sushovan teaches print media studies at the School of Media and Communication (SOMC) at the Kolkata-based Adamas University. He loves to interact with each student of a class across a day's session. As a self-made professional, he believes that challenges and tough times can only bring the best from a person.]



Living in Your Mind: Diving into the World of Brand Identity



Corporate professional turned academic
Subhrajit Dutta talks about the subtle intricacies of building a brand identity.

“What’s in a name?” Asked Shakespeare. A lot, mentions the science of branding.

Imagine that boxes after boxes are stacked in a storehouse. And then, hundreds of thousands of the same get added every day. Suddenly the owner of the storehouse asks for any of those boxes. In exact precision, within a fraction of second, the box needs to be retrieved and delivered.

This storehouse is our mind, where data packets get stored all the time. We see, we experience, we desire, we abhor – zillions of signals get stored there each moment. Say, you are hungry and you recall an amazing previous experience of having the soft and juicy *Kala Jamuns*. You want it again. How will you order? You remembered that those came last time in pink packets with big white elephants printed on the box. And that distinctive font in the logo that looked like small balloons. And the name of the shop



was so unique! 'Nectar', the name sounded straight from 'Lotus-Eaters' of Ulysses, where inhabitants of an island used to consume lotus fruits and flowers that had a narcotic effect on them. Take a pause here and think for a moment. Without that pink packet, the elephant logo, and balloon like fonts, and the brand name 'Nectar', how could you possibly order those *Kala Jamuns* again? That's why companies create brand identity, so that we retrieve the right

Think about the perception that you wish to create in someone's mind. And, then craft the brand elements, your stories and associations to make that mark.

information within the infinite stack of information stored in our mind.

Let's take one step back and start with a brand. Seth Godin, the distinguished author and entrepreneur once said, "A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to

choose one product or service over another." Brand exists in our mind. To reserve this mental place, companies create logo, typography, style, tag lines, use brand colours and create colour palettes, design distinct product packages and websites, a library of graphical elements, an elaborate style guide and develop a visual identity on social



media using images and graphics in a consistent manner.

Brands want us to perceive those in a particular way, and hence, they create brand identity. Think about the crocodile in *Lacoste* or the picture of *Jaguar* in the *Jaguar* logo. In a flash, we can remember those. That's the power of brand identity. And all this for

what? In a way to reserve a place inside our head.

While brand is an emotional concept or can have a philosophically constructed existence, brand identity is for real – the visual components that manifest the un-manifested concept of a brand.

How does brand identity work? Is it simply making

a logo and giving it a name to create a memory? Not at all. We need to align those with something deeper. Logo, for example, is an outward manifestation of an inner connection. Key elements like a brand promise (your commitment to deliver), positioning (how your brand is different from others), personality (how you want people to perceive you), the stories (the history and connected narratives of the brand) and the associations (connecting with positive attributes in



While brand is an emotional concept or can have a philosophically constructed existence, brand identity is for real – the visual components that manifest the un-manifested concept of a brand.



the mind of the audience) transform brand identity into a living element. Brand identity can change. When our products range expands, we enter a new market, our brand does not resemble our values or the identity anymore, we want our audience to see us differently, or we lose reputation due to some issues, we need to start afresh. With a new brand identity, we want people to think of us differently.

Let's take an example of one of the inventors of Covid-19 vaccine, the pharmaceutical biggie Pfizer that has reinvented its brand identity. The blue pill shape logo that we identify the company with for almost 70 years, has now been replaced by the new double helix. Called the 'ribbon helix', with light and dark blue lines, the logo reminds us the gene-based technology that has been used by Pfizer for development of Covid-19 vaccine.

Airbnb changed its logo. Spotify changed too. City of Melbourne came out of its boring existence by changing its logo. My dear readers, you can do it too as an individual. Think about the perception that you wish to create in someone's mind. And, then craft the brand elements, your stories and associations to make that

mark.

Rebranding is exciting, nevertheless, should never be attempted in haste. Rebranding denotes deconstructing many of the previous perceptions that the brand has built with a lot of investment and effort. It can only be suggested when the existing brand identity fails to deliver.

[Author's Introduction: Subhrajit Dutta (Subhro) has 16 plus years of experience in internal and external communications, strategic marketing and digital & social media. Subhro had been engaged with top companies like Accenture, Ogilvy, Haldia Petrochemicals, DuPont and Mahindra & Mahindra. He is a first-rate communications trainer and has conducted workshops for reputed banks and corporate brands. He has also taught communications and digital marketing in Nepal, Bangladesh and India in a number of leading institutions and universities. He has been awarded the Public Relations Professional of the Year (2020) by Public Relations Society of India (PRSI), Kolkata Chapter. Subhro is currently associated with Adamas University as an Associate Professor and HoD – Communication Management at the School of Media & Communication.]



Web-Based Entertainment and Its Future Possibilities



**Teacher-cum-journalist
Dr. Sunayan Bhattacharjee
takes us through the
future of web-based
entertainment.**

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world last year, the human civilization was all at sea. It had no idea vis-à-vis coping with the unprecedented crisis. All human activities were impacted and the world virtually came to a standstill. The pandemic-induced lockdown ensured that people across the globe were confined to their homes. While some continued to work online, there were many others who were not as lucky. Even for people who worked

online, there was a plenty of spare time with virtually nothing to do. Humanity, thus, looked constrained and challenged. The situation simulated a dystopian science fiction movie or a Zombie horror movie.

All these and more were reasons why a significant portion of the population could have lost their psychological balance. However, thankfully most didn't and it is not very difficult to guess the reason either – the presence of robust online entertainment. While social media continued to have its own bandwidth, platforms such as *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime* and *Disney+ Hotstar* became the lifelines of not just the younger lot (who are anyway addicted to the digital medium) but also people who are well past the prime of their youth. It must be mentioned here that the broadcast industry was also

hit by the lockdown and it mostly resorted to relaying old programmes. Thankfully, the Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms didn't have a shortage of content and the show went on. Now that the pandemic is on the wane and people have started getting back to their normal routine, the consumption of web entertainment hasn't decreased by any stretch of imagination. In fact, the pandemic has sort of made us dependent on these online paid platforms. Now, for a moment,

When YouTube started its journey back in 2005, nobody had any idea that the idea of video sharing and its technological successors would become the dominant narrative one day.



imagine a world without the likes of *Netflix* and *YouTube*. The thought in itself is terrifying – having to live a life without watching 'Sacred Games' (2018) or 'Bulbul' (2020). This is the extent to which our lives are dependent on online entertainment. When *YouTube* started its journey back in 2005, nobody had any idea that the idea of video

sharing and its technological successors would become the dominant narrative one day. Now that our lives are being dictated by web entertainment, it might be a worthwhile attempt to look at what the future looks like. Prophetic and expository at the same, time travel couldn't be any more realistic. Some of the



dominant trends in the world of digital entertainment could be summed up with the help of the following pointers:

1. Short Films Will Become the New Normal:

With people spending a significant amount of time on portable devices such as smartphones and tablets, the demand for shorter but engaging

content will increase. Consequently, the sheer number of short films will increase. It is important to remember that short films are crisp and more relatable. Most importantly, short films constitute the perfect content for someone on the go. While going to the office or commuting back home, people can watch short films. Most importantly, viewers can

finish watching short films in one go. Recent trends show us that the demand for shorter content has significantly gone up.

2. The Demand for Original Content Will Go Up:

Gone are the days when people could simply rehash content and impress the audience. The audience is a lot more sophisticated these days. Thus, the demand for cerebral and original content is slowly going up. Most of the OTT platforms are in fact producing a lot of original films and series.

Now that the pandemic is on the wane and people have started getting back to their normal lives, the consumption of web entertainment hasn't decreased by any stretch of imagination.



This is a trend that is visible across the world.

3. Customized Content Will be the Order of the Day: Customized content is the next big thing in the industry. Till about a couple of decades back, entertainment was an unequal transaction between the active producers and the passive

With people spending a significant amount of time on portable devices such as smartphones and tablets, the demand for shorter but engaging content will increase.

consumers. Not anymore! Now, the audience members want to have an active say in what they see. Thus, now, programmes will be produced in consonance with what the audience wants. Interactivity is the key here. Just like gaming, based on what the audience members select, the content will change.

4. Animation Content Will Go Up:

According to the FICCI FRAMES report, the animation and Visual Effects (VFX) sector grew at an unbelievable rate of 20.3 per cent in 2019. This points towards the increasingly popularity of animation content. Both 2D and 3D animation will grow in the next one decade. It is important to remember here that the OTT platform will push this growth of the animation and VFX sector. Not to mention that cinema will also be an added booster.

5. The Gaming Industry Is Set to Grow: At one point of time, gaming was largely

considered to be the domain of children and young adults. The scene, however, has changed. Now, there are people who invest a significant amount of time in gaming. Sophisticated and more complex games are now dominating the gaming market. Therefore, the gaming industry will become much bigger than what it currently is.

6. Local Content Will be King: The sheer amount of content in regional languages will go up significantly. Multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic countries such as India are going to play a meaty role in this transformation. In fact, most of the OTT platforms have considerably increased content in local languages to meet the growing international demand. Local content with an international orientation is going to be the dominant trend.

7. Smartphones Are Set to Become the Primary Entertainment Consumption

Programmes will be produced in consonance with what the audience wants.

Channels: With people moving towards portability, bulky desktops and laptops are going to give way to mobile devices including smartphones and tablets. Most of the content will be consumed in smaller devices and hence OTT platforms will reorient and restructure their content in consonance with that.

8. 'Do It Yourself' or DIY Content Will Increase: With people increasingly turning towards the digital platform for learning various skills, DIY content will significantly increase. In fact, a whole new ecosystem

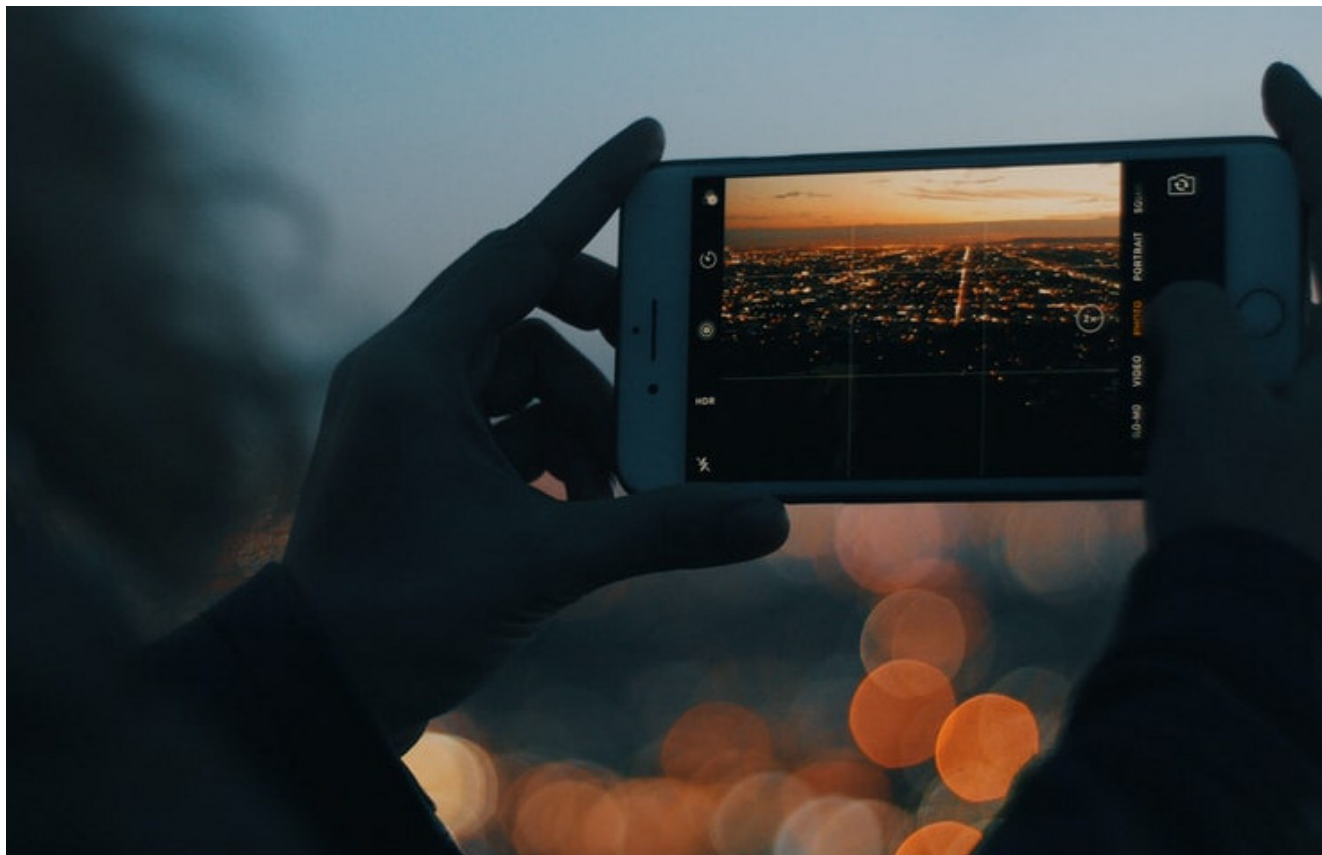


The pandemic-induced lockdown ensured that people across the globe were confined to their homes.

will be created around DIY content. Although, these are the larger trends, the fact remains that the sector is evolving with each passing day and it is a very difficult proposition to exactly pinpoint all the trends. However, one thing can be said for sure. The sector is set to heat up and become more interesting in the coming days.

[Author's Introduction: Currently an

Associate Professor with the Kolkata-based Adamas University, Dr. Sunayan Bhattacharjee has a Ph.D. in Film Studies from Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University in Gandhinagar and a MMC degree with specialization in Journalism from Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication in Pune. A UGC-NET qualified scholar in Mass Communication and Journalism, Sunayan studied the surrealist works of renowned American filmmaker David Lynch for his Ph.D. thesis. Sunayan has a cumulative experience of more than a decade in the creative and academic domains. He was earlier an Assistant Professor at Pearl Academy in Delhi. He also has the distinction of having worked with leading organizations such as Reuters News, The Times of India and Ramoji Film City. Additionally, he has worked as an Associate Editor with The Cinemaholic and has edited edInbox, an educational news portal.]





Be Like Durga: Brave Is the New Beautiful

Shreyasi Mitra,
Student, School of Education, Adamas
University, Kolkata

Every woman should be the Durga she believes in. Every time, there is injustice that tears our soul, we need to fiercely protect ourselves. I refuse to accept any constraint; maybe this is what draws me towards her *shakti*. Just like Maa Durga, women in India are powerful, courageous and incredible.

Every woman is *Shakti* (energy), *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Mukti* (Liberation), and should be treated as such. Durga Puja marks the victory of Goddess Durga over the buffalo demon Mahishasura. It epitomizes the victory of good over evil. Maa Durga is depicted as a warrior goddess, an epitome of pure love, courage, beauty, strength and knowledge.

We are still being killed in the womb; we are being sold; we are beaten as a sign of power; we are judged for our choices – and all this makes me extremely angry. As privileged young women, we might think that these issues are being hyped for media attention, but the truth of the not-so-privileged ones will leave you unsettled.

The projection of the fierce side of womanhood represents Durga and her strong power. *Women across the globe have a universal voice, "We want to be equal"*. Women want a future that belongs to themselves. We are aggressive, angry, opinionated and, at





times, unapologetic, because it is high time our existence is not taken for granted.

All of us pray in front of Durga to give divine *Shakti* but when it comes to the office, we often forget to respect her. The lady sitting in the corner desk of office is another face of Durga. But for us, she is

We are aggressive, angry, opinionated and, at times, unapologetic, because it is high time our existence is not taken for granted.

just a woman who is doing her work. Well, it's our call to give her respect and appreciation for her hard work. However, when she often finds her in a critical situation she does not find any support. So, what to do then! Should she never spell a word in front of anyone? No! This shouldn't be the case.

It does not matter how much work the organizations preventing violence and law enforcement agencies put up to keep women safe, some people always make it a point to violate women's dignity. Consequently, it is essential for every woman to stand up for her rights and freedom. In these complex situations, only her self-defence training can help. This training enables her to handle the most critical situations at the office premises on her own.

Durga is Fearless. She is a Rebel! She is known for taking the right steps at the right moment. She is half of Shiva and

renowned as the mother of the universe! Every woman hopes to achieve something extraordinary in her life. She wants to live her life independently but when it comes to choosing her career and her life, she is often stopped by family, friends or even relatives. They often say, *"Don't do this just because you are a girl!"* or *"You can't work late in the office, as you may get harmed."* GIVE A STOP TO THESE COMMENTS!

Every year, the four to five days of Durga Puja in West Bengal come with its own promise of celebrating a female goddess and by extension, all the women around us. The actual condition, however, does not change even amidst the lights and the sound of *Dhaak*.

There is a reason why Durga Puja is no longer just a 'Puja' – a long saga of tradition and ritual strictly religious in nature. Over the years, this particular Puja has gained social, cultural and lately, political currency to such an extent that it is now a full-fledged festival – starting right from Mahalaya till Dashami or the 10th day of the Puja, when the idols are finally immersed in water. In current times, the collective consciousness around Durga Puja, partly fuelled by the advertisement industry and the media, is one of progress, development and most importantly, empowerment of women.

Goddess Durga defeating the demon king Mahishasura is not just an inspiration but also a metaphor. The very name 'Durga' has come to symbolize power, strength, bravery – all things the society admits women today need for their struggle while none of them are willing to make the changes required to break the unfair structure. On the other hand, Durga is also a nurturer, a caregiver – she is the symbol of homeliness and family. She represents every married daughter who returns to her parents from her in-laws' house with her children.

The entire commercialized aspect of

Every woman is Shakti (energy), Bhakti (devotion) and Mukti (Liberation), and should be treated as such.





Durga Puja is also mostly dominated by men. The Puja committees that are formed in every locality and area comprise of men and while entering the Puja pandals, it is hard not to notice their names as exhibited on various hoardings – the benefactor, the chairperson, the president of the

committee are all men. Quite recently, women purohit are starting to come up and conduct marriages but all the Durga Pujas are still performed by male priests. The art and decoration of the pandals are also by male artists. From the famous pandals of Kolkata, which are

known for their grandeur and art to the smaller pandals tucked inside a lane in a small locality – the art and decoration is primarily by men. The various aesthetic idols of Maa Durga that we get to see in these pandals, are all the imaginations of men. The entire conception behind these pandals are from a male perspective and a gendering of art begins here, extremely subtly. Advertisements look like poor validation from a patriarchal society that blatantly asks their

A contradictory festival in itself, Durga Puja is supposed to be that time of the year where the society embraces a daughter with open arms while also passing subtle derogatory comments when a girl is wearing shorts as a part of her festive apparel.

women to overexert themselves in all spheres of life and to do it alone. She should expect no help from her husband (ironically, quite like Durga's husband Shiva) but if she manages to achieve the impossible, she gets compared to a reverent goddess and that is all the acknowledgement she gets. In addition to that, if she does decide to buy the latest mixer-grinder as shown in these advertisements, maybe her kitchen work lessens a bit so she can focus on her children's academics. The 'Mahalaya' shows which are televised in the popular Bengali entertainment channels have an all-female cast that tries to imagine and re-imagine the story of Durga along with her different avatars through song, drama and dance. In order to attract more viewers, popular Tollywood actresses are often roped in to play the main part of Maa Durga. Tollywood actresses and



popular serial actresses are also invited to inaugurate various Puja pandals. Our society and culture are at a critical juncture. There is a drastic slide in social, moral and human values. There is a rule of vice over virtue. Men in positions of power often do this. Now that women have started speaking out, we should take it seriously. The true victory for women is when she is accepted in any and every form. One needs to listen to her and let her speak. It's definitely very courageous to come out and talk about such incidents. But when we go and talk about rights and freedom to the entire world and come back to the same holes in our home it makes no sense. The change has to start from us, our people, which later turns out to be our society.

We as a family are responsible for the gender discrimination starting from childhood. It is us who assign gender stereotypes in the innocent minds of children when we say, "boys don't cry" or "girls shouldn't be outspoken." The positive change should happen from within the families – where we treat our children equally and say it is not okay to discriminate. Furthermore, we see a difference in the way a daughter of the house is treated from the daughter-in-law. These are the stereotypes that need to change. The first teacher to every child is the mother, so it is important for us – women – to empower ourselves by teaching our boys to respect women. A contradictory festival in itself, Durga Puja is supposed to be that time of the year where the society embraces a daughter with open arms while also passing subtle derogatory comments when a girl is wearing shorts as a part of her festive apparel. Bright and shiny on the outside, the festival of Durga Puja promises to truly worship female power or *Nari Shakti* but ends up being a dichotomy – of joy and also of oppression, which somehow gets exacerbated.

From the Desk of the Executive Editor

The Last Word

EDUCATION@2021: The Roadmap Ahead

We are at a crucial threshold in the educational sector post 2020. The sector has witnessed paradigm changes subject to the pandemic-induced closure of campuses and the rise of digital learning across the nation since the second half of March.

While on one hand, 52 per cent of the 283 million students in India beyond the primary education are in the zero education domain, the remaining 48 per cent are also at varying levels of digitally delivered education. The discussion we often do in public domain, more so in English language, is about the luckier 48 per cent, or even a smaller part of them.

So the roadmap ahead needs to look at the roles of the policy makers in governance, educational entrepreneurs in the private sectors, educational administrators in the



We have leapfrogged by more than a decade in the last ten months and the momentum must not be lost.

public and privately run institutions, faculty members or mentors and the learners (often called students).

Policy Makers

While a great educational vision in the

form of a 64-page-long New Educational Policy (NEP) has been announced by the central government in India in 2020, the implementing roadmap is yet to be spelt out. From vision to execution on ground is a long arduous journey. The government has to spell which specific measures should be executed this year and at which level of education, what will be the regional and linguistic variations, if any, and how shall we account for the infrastructure needed to implement the policy, at least those in the public institutions run by the government.

The digital divide is real and glaring, and hence doubling the education budget, as promised in the policy, needs to be seen on ground with additional money ideally put exclusively in giving digital access to institutions and students in the government education ecosystem.

Edu Entrepreneurs

The first priority of the educational entrepreneurs is to invest heavily in digital transformation of their campuses, considering this as a positive, essential, long-term investment not looking for an immediate return. Digital overhauling will need retraining of the faculty members in blended education, creating the necessary infrastructure in producing open online courses, videos and podcasts, infographics, blended learning classrooms, proctored remote examinations, virtual libraries, studios and laboratories, et al. Shared capital concept needs to be harnessed to where infrastructure of one institute can support that of another on paid basis or even free if it is the less privileged category of students in nearby schools and colleges.

Education Administrators

Administrators, from school to university, from public to private institutes, must with an urgency retrain staff in digital and going ahead blended education, bring in the necessary infrastructure for the same, and move to outcome-based education where



learning objectives and outcomes alone should judge the success of the task of educational delivery.

The specific roadmap for the implementation of NEP, as given by the government and relevant authorities, also would be another focus area of work this year. Alongside, preserving and nurturing autonomy in academic functioning zealously should be the other focus area to

make a visionary education well practiced as well.

Mentors/ Faculty Members

The biggest need for mentors (once called the teachers), is to evolve to a mentor mindset from that of a teacher, completely relearn pedagogy with technology, move to a flipped classroom method where they aggregate their own proprietary content

along with available open learning resources and give to the learners well in advance.

The mentors must also adapt to new and creative ways of learning resources or content creation, then platforms for content delivery, then ways and means to ensure learners' engagement offline and online, and finally evaluate the learner effectively through a bevy of assessment techniques and processes (open book exams, remote exams, proctored exams, analytical and applied tests, presentations, quizzes, live projects, simulated projects, debates, physical written tests, model making, et al). Making of massive open online courses (MOOCs), and ability to examine with questions whose answers cannot be googled or copy-pasted from a book are the new techniques the mentors need to master and very fast. In 2021.

Learners

The learner has to move away from a student's mindset to a learner's mindset, where self-learning becomes significant, learning within and beyond the classroom along with learning from structured and organic syllabi both becoming the norm. With no lifetime careers being the reality ahead, learning to learn, and adapting to

technology with changing times are crucial skillsets of the learners. With automation, robotics, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) becoming the order of tomorrow, the learning is now a design function. So learners need to evolve to be creative, innovative, problem solvers, crisis managers, leaders and team workers simultaneously and good communicators. This will need adhering to voluntary learning as against enforced education, experiential brick and portal learning as against rote learning, continuous assessments as against sporadic ones, and blending major and minor areas of learning depending on the various career choices one makes.

We have leapfrogged by more than a decade in the last ten months and the momentum must not be lost. We just need to blend the physical with the digital, the synchronous with the asynchronous, the concepts with the practical, the classroom with the self-learning space, all the more than ever before.

Prof. Ujjwal K Chowdhury
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