
Utilization Level of Internet Based Technology in Mass Communication Education Offered through Open and Distance Learning Mode in India

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Abstract: *Technology has changed every field of life including education. It gave a strong support to open and distance learning mode of education. Open and distance learning (ODL) was introduced as an option to the conventional mode of education which had time and space related rigidities. ODL liberated the learners from time and space related limitations or barriers with the help of various technologies. The modern information and communication technology (ICT) has extensive potential to minimize the transactional distance between students and teachers, students and students, and students and institutions. This paper talks about the utilization level of internet based technology in mass communication education offered through open and distance learning mode in India.*

Keywords: *Internet based technology, mass communication education, open and distance learning mode, transactional distance*

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet is playing very important role in every field of life. Now, it is difficult to imagine the life without internet. We are using internet effectively in governance, commerce, education and even religion also. Despite the existence of digital divide, internet based services have completely revolutionized these fields and made these services smoother, easier and transparent. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is also not an exception. Internet has changed this sector too. Immediacy and interactivity, the major characteristics of internet, have huge potential to provide the effective solutions of the issues faced by distance education.

'Distance' is the biggest challenge for ODL. Distance between students and teachers, distance between students and students, and distance between institutions and students make this mode more challenging. Distance educators have been trying to overcome this issue with the help of technology, and internet is the most appropriate solution. We all know that open and distance education is our need. It serves many purposes. It is very difficult for a developing country like India with a huge population to fulfill the need of higher education by the conventional face to face teaching mode. Budgetary constraints; social, economic and geographical diversities of the population; and the changing need of professional and technical sectors where continuous updating of knowledge is required; create such a situation where open and distance learning is must. So now the focus is to make this mode more and more effective and internet is the best way out.

Like many other academic disciplines, mass communication programmes are also being offered through both the modes: regular face to face mode and open and distance learning mode. Various types of institutions (central universities, state universities, open universities, private universities, etc.) are offering mass communication programmes through ODL at different levels (certificate, diploma, bachelor degree, post graduate diploma and master degree). Since mass communication is a practical oriented discipline, internet based technological tools can play very important role in effective delivery of ODL mass communication programmes.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of scholars have worked on the role of technology in open and distance learning. Wedemeyer (1978) accepted that revolution in communication technology opened the door for independent education and open learning activities. According to him, the modern communication technologies liberated teaching-learning activities from the space-time barrier. Classroom model was required in old days when speech was the only possible mode of

communication but now in the era of electronic communication modes, the teaching-learning environment can easily incorporate the physical distance between teacher and learner.

Internet is changing the whole educational scenario rapidly. Park et al. (2007) argued that there were growing concern over the possible decline of traditional educational practices and institutions. According to the authors, due to technological explosion, e-learning programmes, virtual universities, and open and distance education had become the viable higher education platforms. They suggested that teachers, students and administrators were using internet and web for their activities and e-learning had become the main item for educational agendas.

According to Yáñez, Okada and Palau (2015), the huge number of digital technology users, ubiquitous learning and digitalization of culture are the key features of 21st century and these features shape the world's educational scenario.

While studying the Indian ODL media education, Dutta and Ray (2015) highlighted the need of technology integration to deliver quality media programmes through ODL. They suggested the extensive use of digital technology in delivery of programmes. Dutta and Ray also recommend the more and more use of conferencing technologies for immediate and effective feedback.

3. OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this study was following:

i) To ascertain the utilization level of internet based technological tools and applications in mass communication education offered through open and distance learning mode in India.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It was a quantitative study. Survey was used to collect the relevant data. Purposive sampling was applied. The major part of the survey was conducted through online, but a number of questionnaires were administered through face-to-face group administration also. Total 8617 ODL students of 10 different institutions (including IGNOU) were approached for the survey, majorly through online modes (e-mails, Facebook groups and pages). The survey was open for six months and conducted during May 2016 to October 2016. After all the efforts, total 207 valid responses were received.

Two types of ODL students were included in this study. First, who were pursuing any mass communication programme through ODL at the time of survey and second, who had recently (not before 2011) completed any ODL mass communication programme. This information was asked in the first question which was the qualifying question for the respondents.

5. FINDINGS

The findings revealed the level of utilization of internet based technological tools and application in ODL mass communication education.

Respondents' Profile

As mentioned above, total 207 valid responses were received. Out of total 207 respondents (ODL mass communication students), 155 (74.88%) were male and 52 (25.12%) were female. No one opted the third gender category, 'other'. Residential background of the students was important for this study, that's why this information was also asked in the survey. Out of 207 respondents, 153 (73.91%) were from urban areas (All places with a corporation, municipality, cantonment board or notified town area committee, etc.) and 54 (26.09%) were from rural areas.

Internet based Technological Tools and Applications Used in the Delivery of ODL Mass Communication Programmes

As discussed above, the main objective of this study was to find out the utilization level of internet based technological tools and applications in mass communication education offered through open and distance learning mode in India. The respondents (ODL mass communication students) were asked to select the internet based

technological tools used in the delivery of ODL mass communication programmes by their institutions. An extensive list of different internet based technological tools and applications were given as the options. Since more than one technological tool might be used, so respondents were allowed to select more than one option. Chart (1.1) shows the findings :

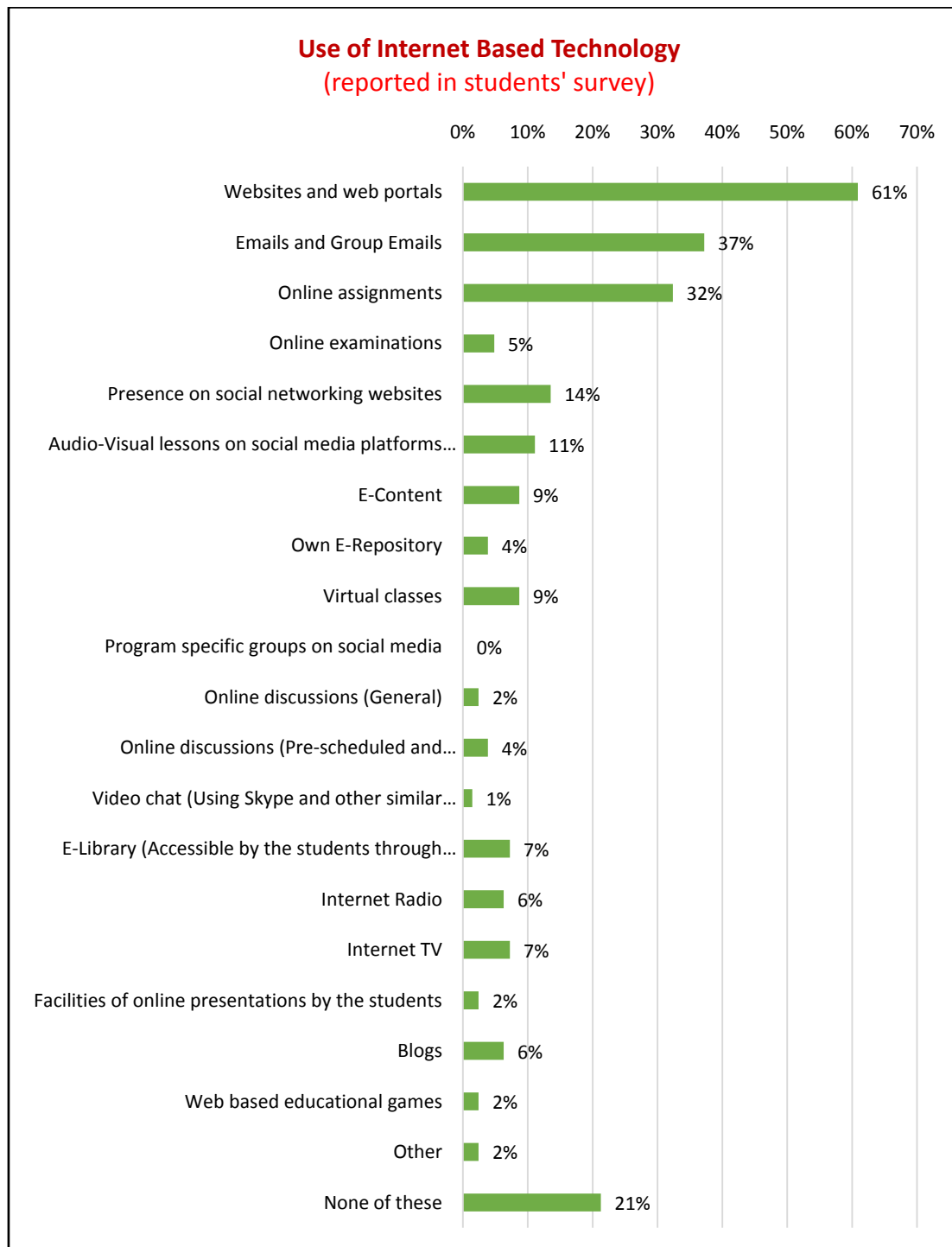


Chart (1.1) Internet based technological tools and applications used in the delivery of ODL mass communication programmes (Note: respondents were allowed to choose more than one option. Percentages rounded off to whole numbers)

Average (Mean) of all internet based tools or applications = 11.05% and 'None of these' = 21%

According to respondents, 'websites and web portals' were most used internet based tools followed by 'Emails and Group Emails' and 'Online assignment'. Out of 207 respondents, 21% selected the option 'None of these'. The option

'Programme specific groups on social media' got zero response. Internet radio and internet TV can play very important role in delivery of ODL mass communication programmes but these tools were found extremely less utilized. Internet provides many low cost and almost free tools and applications which can significantly increase the level of interactivity between teacher and ODL students, but the findings showed the lower utilization level of these types of tools and applications(online discussions, video chats, etc.)

As discussed earlier, internet can be used extensively to provide useful audiovisual lessons to the students sitting at distant places, but findings of this study revealed that these types of internet based tools and applications were not used adequately in the delivery of ODL mass communication programmes. For example, 'Audio-visual lessons on social media platforms like You-tube' and 'own e-repository' got only 11 % and 4% respectively.

6. CONCLUSION

The level of interactivity between teachers and students is crucial in all teaching-learning activities, and it has been the biggest challenge for open and distance educators. ODL educators have been trying to increase the interactivity between teacher and students through different tools and technologies. Internet has emerged as the best solution. It has great potential to play very important role in effective delivery of ODL mass communication programmes. It can increase the interactivity level between teachers and students, students and students, and students and institutions.

Apart from interactivity level, internet can help on other fronts also. Audiovisual content can offer a great help in demonstrating many components of the mass communication programmes. Different components of still photography, audio production, video production, filmmaking, multimedia production, etc. can effectively be demonstrated with the help of audiovisual lessons, and useful audiovisual study material can easily be provided to the students with the help of internet based technological tools and applications. The low-cost internet based technological tools and applications have tremendous capacity to enhance the quality of ODL mass communication programmes, but the findings showed the lower utilization level of these technologies on the ground.

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