E-Learning in India: Segmenting Students of a Business School based on their Perception

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ABSTRACT

E-learning has become an important tool to impart education. This study examines the awareness and perception of e-learning among Indian students enrolled for a business management course at a premier business school. It is generally perceived that since Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A) is universally acknowledged for its quality of education, the awareness and perception about e-learning would be uniform. This could be attributed to factors like a sound educational background and the exposure to information technology. This study attempts to segment the sample based on the student perception towards e-learning. The results show that the level of awareness and the degree of familiarity with e-learning technologies are high. Three student clusters were found, which split the students into those with ‘high motivational & learning propensity’, ‘neutral motivational & learning propensity’ and ‘low motivational & learning propensity.’ These three clusters were labeled as ‘Enthusiastic,’ ‘Pragmatist,’ and ‘Unenthusiastic.’ Further, it was found that the age of students varied significantly within these three clusters.

Keywords: Awareness, Collaborative Learning, Cooperative Learning, Learning Communities, Perception

INTRODUCTION

The last decade has seen a global upsurge in the number of educational institutes adopting e-learning as a medium to impart education. E-Learning has, by far, been largely accepted in the developed countries and is gradually becoming popular in the developing nations too. According to Allen and Seaman (2010), online enrollments in the U.S. higher education sector in year 2010 rose by almost a million students, compared to the previous year. This amounts to a growth rate of 21% for online enrollments, which far exceeds the 2% growth recorded in the overall higher education student population in the U.S. More than half of the surveyed institutions believe that the economic changes will have a positive impact on the overall enrollments and that specific aspects of an economic downturn resonate closely with increasing demand for online courses. In the U.S., approximately 70% of accredited colleges and universities offer online courses (Arbaugh, 2000). It is the believed by several experts that many corporations will be going for on-line training within the next few years (Herther, 1997).

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In India, and other developing countries, e-learning is slowly becoming a popular form of educational medium for delivering education in both retail and enterprise market segments. While globally, a number of big technology players like IBM, Cisco, Oracle and Sun Microsystems have played an important role in popularizing and thereby fueling the growth of the online education market, in India the same role has been played by NIIT Limited. NIIT Limited is one of the popular service providers delivering education and training via the Web. Similarly, a number of educational institutes like Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Symbiosis Institute for Distance Learning etc. have been using this medium to impart education in India.

This growth and acceptance of e-learning as a medium of instruction can also be attributed to easy access to supply side factors. The last few years have witnessed a tremendous competition between the players selling IT infrastructure such as hardware, software and Internet bandwidth which has resulted in a steep fall in the price of these products, making them affordable. More recently, with the mobile revolution and telephony penetrating even the smallest towns of the country, India is poised to reap big dividends through exploitation of e-learning technologies for education and training.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is E-Learning?

E-learning is a broader concept which allows education seekers to learn at their own pace using a wide variety of Information Technology tools such as the computers, Internet, World Wide Web, multimedia, audio and video streaming, virtual classrooms, satellite, audio-video tapes, compact disk etc. For simplicity and for the purpose of this paper, we define the term e-learning as one which uses information technology to facilitate resource sharing and interaction between learner and the instructor. The interaction can be synchronous or asynchronous.

In the past, various studies have referred to the concept of e-learning as online learning or computer based learning. There is confusion among researchers when referring to the term ‘electronic.’ According to Smith (2005), at one end of a spectrum, it can mean merely the occasional exchange of emails between learner and instructor, with no other learning resources or experiences provided in electronic form. At a slightly advanced level, it can mean that learning materials are available to learners electronically for them to read on the screen or for download, but without any communication between instructor and learner. At a much more sophisticated level, it can mean that the learning resources are available electronically, and supported by a groupware system where learners can interact with each other as well as their instructor. According to Biggs (2003), since e-learning can take different forms it brings uncertainties and questions regarding the efficacy of the technology. According to Turney et al. (2009), in some instances, technology is used to provide online access to basic course information and its content. Alternatively, at the other extreme, it may be a fully integrated teaching and learning system. Willson (2008) emphasizes the educational effectiveness of hybrid course delivery such as an e-mail-only university communication, learning management system support for traditional classes, completely online courses, online information resources, and real-time feedback mechanisms in large lectures. It seeks to combine the advantages of technology with the benefits of human contact in the classroom.

E-Learning versus Traditional Learning

Face to face learning involves the use of traditional education delivery media such as chalk, black board and overhead projector. However, with the advancements in technological innovations, the traditional education delivery media are fast being replaced by newer technology based media. The new media offer a wider flexibility in learning and a widespread reach
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