

Chapter 19

Examining Virtual Classroom Platforms in Hospitality Education: Effect of Service Quality, Perceived Ease of Use, and Perceived Usefulness

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ABSTRACT

Though hospitality education relies strongly on experiential learning, the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled all the higher educational institutions including the institute of hotel managements (IHMs) to restrict on-campus learning. As the only possible solution to deliver uninterrupted knowledge and skills to the students under these adverse circumstances, the management of these IHMs has quickly retorted to virtual classrooms. Many virtual platforms such as Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Cisco Webex, etc. emerged as the elixir for the institutions with customized features to fulfil the learning needs of the students. This necessitates the need to not only examine and compare the perceptions of these platforms based on virtual classroom service quality, perceived ease of use, and perceived usefulness but also to understand the impact of these perceptions on the future scope in terms of satisfaction and behavioral intentions of the hospitality students in IHMs.

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INTRODUCTION

Online learning in the last decade has witnessed immense popularity and depicted extraordinary progress owing to the rapid development of internet technologies globally. Society has begun to capture various benefits that technology in virtual learning offer to them. The immersion of the students in virtual platforms will equip them for being future innovators and leaders in the domain of technology (Terrier, 2020).

The digital transformation in education should not be perceived only as a convenience. The Covid-19 scenario had awakened the global education systems when the technology of virtual classrooms emerged as the only means of educational delivery to students around the world. The schools and higher educational institutes had to instantly enhance their technological capabilities to redesign, dissipate and assess their curriculum. The institutions face the challenge of maintaining student engagement digitally and competed in training the teachers on these virtual classroom platforms for contributing to the dynamic learning scenario for both of them. With newer ideas of blended and flipped learning, the institutions compete to create an engaging and interactive environment for education.

In India, with the internet data becoming cheaper than ever before in recent years and with the companies striving to attract customers with value data packs, virtual learning has established its reach to almost every nook of the country. However, with the world managing the Covid-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019) pandemic challenge, the idea of social distancing and self-isolation has become the components of new-normal. Though many businesses and offices have gradually started their operations with these restrictions in place, the educational institutions, including the Institutes of Hotel Management (IHM), in particular, have not yet been granted permission to commence their session in-campus. Therefore, to deliver uninterrupted knowledge and skills to the students, the management of these IHMs has quickly retorted to virtual classrooms as the only possible solution under these adverse circumstances.

The quality of virtual classrooms have been discussed within academia extensively (Nijjer & Raj, 2020). The challenges regarding managing the classroom engagement with feedback and support from faculty, student coordinators, and institute at regular intervals are important indicators for the success or failure of online education service quality (Lee, 2010). Further, ease of assessment in the classroom also contributes to the success of these online classrooms. However, the appropriateness of online delivery and support services and the void of direct faculty interaction remain important issues in online teaching through virtual classrooms.

As obstacles of online learning are alleviated through advanced technology, there is an immense need to evaluate perceptions of hospitality students towards virtual classrooms (Kim & Jeong, 2018). The satisfaction and acceptance of virtual classrooms depend on either excitement or discouragement resulting from technological worries or technological ease to use these virtual classrooms. The students share their positive feelings with their friends and faculty if their virtual classroom experience is amicable. The studies also indicate that the satisfaction and acceptance of virtual learning are impacted through mental barriers of the students regarding the ease of use and usefulness of these virtual classes (Mejia & Phelan, 2013). Compared to in-person learning at the institute campus, online learning has its advantages and challenges (Annaraud & Singh, 2017). This is especially true for hospitality education as most of the curriculum for students is based on experiential learning techniques. At the same time, online learning through virtual classrooms is considered the forthcoming mode of tourism and hospitality education (Kim & Jeong, 2018). As such, there is a need for evaluation of learning through virtual classrooms and the future scope of these platforms, especially amongst hospitality students.

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