Business Communication Teaching to Indian Students in the Times of COVID19

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Abstract: *Covid19 has changed the world as we knew it. There has been a paradigm shift in the way the world does business. People and their interpersonal dynamics have altered as have their perspectives in life. Teachership in the times of the pandemic has been a challenge in its own right. Like many Indians across different professions, there is a digital divide among teachers as well. Transitioning to Online Teaching has been a unique and stimulating experience fraught with hits and misses. Business Communication Teaching and Interpersonal Skills Training too underwent a significant transition in the areas of lexicon, kinaesthetics, corporate attributes, digital/electronic communication. WFH (Work from Home), in itself a new word, brought with it the baggage of accompanying vocabulary. To probe these unusual working jargons, understand the shifting of focus from physical to virtual and its accompanying corporate etiquette requires immediate research attention.*

To this end, a survey was conducted to ask working professionals from different domains to contribute their valuable insights into the points of change noted during their communicative experiences in course of the Covid 19 pandemic induced WFH. This study and an analysis of the responses, is an attempt to address the different areas of change that we have undergone to arrive at Communication2.0. The paper is an honest experiential documentation of the shifts that are underway as well as those envisaged in terms of Teaching Communication in the times of Corona.

Keywords: Business Communication, Kinaesthetics, Online Teaching, Post Covid, WFH

Introduction

History of Business Communication Teaching in India: Business Communication Teaching in India is born of previously conceived and practised disciplines like English Language Teaching (ELT), and an area of immense importance in the context of its association with the ever-changing practices of the business and corporate world. It is a very dynamic field which demands academic probing. Since teaching the subject also needs an open-ended approach to the demands of the actual industrial world, the contents and the pedagogy as practised in contemporary educational institutions demands constant scrutiny and upgrading. But, unfortunately, not much has been done in this respect in India. In the absence of effective research initiatives, academic institutions pursue old models of syllabus and pedagogy, creating in the process a gap between the demands of the real-life business world and a stagnant worldview that characterizes the contemporary teaching practices in academic institutions.

Literature Review

Since Business Communication is a young subject born out of the forces of globalization and therefore does not, have an organized pedagogy for itself. One learns partly from the pre-existing pedagogy of ELT in India, and mostly from that in the West. As an offspring of ELT, and later ETP, one will not, hopefully, be wrong in assuming that a research on best practice pedagogy for Business Communication may verily start from Western pedagogy for ELT since the 1900s. Coupled with the Western past is the Eastern (Indian) present, where one draws lessons from N.S.Prabhu's experiments in the Bangalore Project. More recently, Ms Surabhi Banerjee's erudite comments on Business Communication offer some insights.

The thrust of this paper is to study and discuss the impact of online teaching – learning processes post Covid 19. Towards that end, this paper has referred to certain web sources for present day information on

impact of online teaching learning, attention spans, digital resources and their advantages/disadvantages, tools, tracking data usage patterns in India, among others, in order to trace the post Covid effects of online teaching -learning processes and their outcomes. These have all been referenced at the end of the paper.

Business Communication may be defined as an amalgam of linguistic as well as non -linguistic components of communication that are put to use when a user consciously and pragmatically transacts business with another.

Pedagogy of Business Communication Teaching in India

Different University accredited programs in India, have variously entitled English/Technical English,/Communicative English/ Technical Communication , Business Communication. This is a coded paper, i.e. a paper that is evaluated for 100 marks by the University at the end of the term, taught in most Indian institutions offering University affiliated courses like Bachelors of Business Administration (BBA), Bachelors of Computer Applications (BCA), Masters in Business Administration (MBA), Masters in Computer Application (MCA), Bachelor in Technology (B.Tech), Bachelor in Hotel Management (BHM), Bachelor in Hospital Management (B. Hosp) and so on. The University curriculum for these courses includes modules on Communicative Processes, Reading Comprehension, Public Speaking, Writing Business Messages and Effective Listening Skills, along with some prescriptive Grammar. The University objective for this subject, at the outset, is stated to aim at development of students' fluency in LSRW skills with Presentation, Group Discussion and Discourse Management incorporated. Such courses, however, fail to address the need of the corporate sectors which absorb the fast-developing technical innovations and catch up with a globalized world order. 75% of graduates in India were unemployable (Nasscom, Sep 2009).

Present Scenario

The subject is taught in 2 formats – the first being a theoretical and conceptual approach to the tenets of LSRW. The focus here is on understanding the principles of these modules and learning how to format communication and correspondence along the acceptable lines. Then comes the communication that is practiced in Language Laboratories, essentially verbal and kinaesthetic in nature. This is perhaps where a student learns the nuances of articulation, enunciation and kinaesthetics to secure a job and grow in it. The teachers of this subject are mostly specialized in Literature, Language or Management and are, strictly speaking, without 'prior knowledge' (educationally) in the subject. 'Prior experience', also not necessarily in Business Communication, in most cases, substitute for in – depth knowledge. This is primarily because Business Communication is not yet offered very widely as an area of specialization studies in India, resulting in a vacuum in this particular area of studies.

The syllabus content of Business Communication is often divided into predetermined parts with every theory and practical class hour virtually accounted for. This, coupled with the deadline of semester exams, often limit the teacher from going beyond the itemized syllabus of the University, thereby treating it as just another credit garnering subject. The teaching methodology used for this subject also mirrors the methodology of most other disciplines i.e. Transmission Type Teaching for the written portion of the syllabus and Communicative Approach for the non-written part of the syllabus.

The ongoing pandemic Covid 19 has deeply impacted the world. From businesses to relationships, humankind has taken a step back to recalibrate. Positive effects noted so far are the impact on the environment, due to the extensive lockdowns imposed globally. Between globalized economic upturns of the early 2019s and the sudden walling up of the countries in a belated and quasi-ineffectual effort to stall the spread of the virus, around March 2020, our entire reference frame of existence underwent a paradigm shift. Digitization took stronger roots as the basis of life. Teachers adapted, albeit slower than many, to online teaching.

Initially there was a sense of inertia as one hoped to quickly get back to the traditional methods and looked at online teaching as a stop gap arrangement. Soon one realized that this is no short term arrangement. Teachers gradually adopted new methods to improve communication with students. Tools like Google Meet, Zoom etc. were adopted to simulate classroom teaching as much as possible. Going forward, in-person teaching will presumably always include a blend of online learning elements as well.

Methodology

To study the effects of the pandemic on Teaching-Learning, a few questions were formulated, tracing answers to which would chart out the impact of the pandemic on pedagogy and tools of education:

1. How has Communication changed during/post Covid19?
2. How has 'teaching Communication' changed?
3. How should one redefine kinaesthetics in a virtual world?
4. What are protocols in a Meet/Zoom communication?
5. In a contactless world, is 'team-playing' even an attribute anymore?
6. How has brand promotions been impacted? Time and conflict management?
7. How has Covid19 generated its own jargon in the commercial world?
8. How to bridge the communication gap with the digital-data challenged strata of population?
9. Is it ethical to work remotely or be required to work remotely, beyond the offline workhours? How is WFH influencing media of communication?
10. What are the challenges regarding data safety while teaching virtually? How is WFH influencing media of communication?

These and some more areas are proposed to be explored and analyzed in this paper.

Discussion

Changes in Post Covid Communication: To address the very first concern at the outset, communication has indeed, undergone a tectonic shift in post Covid times. For one, it has become less personality centric and more technology centric.

Teaching' Communication in post Covid: Business Communication Teaching includes teaching of language, correspondence protocols, kinaesthetics, Team Dynamics, Leadership Skills, Ethics, LSRW, Presentation Skills, Designing Promotional, Communicative Etiquette etc. Personal experience supported by Tony Wright (1991, Roles of Teachers and Learners) and Elis and Johnson (1994, Teaching Business English) leads one to conclude that a teacher is a performer. How then, does one perform on screen, for one's online class? It is a globally accepted fact that the attention span of learners at the young to mid-level is a less than 30 seconds (Microsoft's survey says 12 to 8 secs, 24th May, 2021 report). Another study claims it is 10 to 15 mins. This study was conducted at EU Business School.

The varying time spans notwithstanding, it is safe to conclude that attention span has been steadily decreasing since the 2000s and is now lower than that of a goldfish! Kevin McSpadden's study published on May 14th, 2015, in Time, corroborates this. To engage a learner for an hour's worth of online content and simultaneously make it multisensory in appeal requires teachers to not only ace their content, but also its digital presentation. Let us examine the challenges of teaching Business Communication online to Indian students and attempt to map it vis a vis the global scenario for the same. It reports that 84% of teachers do not have the wherewithal (device, bandwidth, technological competence, to deal with online teaching. One is sure the students are equally under duress.

Changes in 'written' communication: With the onslaught of virtual business communication in writing, during Covid19, the importance of teaching business correspondence protocols have gathered a fresh lease of life. Teaching Business Correspondence hard copy formats have become nearly redundant.

Business today is contactless and so is Business Communication. An email can substitute the memo. It is fast, brief, as formal as one wants it to be or otherwise. The role of Agenda and Minutes of Meetings may soon undergo a transition from the set template to a bulleted list of information, also shared via email. Proposals, Project Reports may be attached in PDF or PPT formats. To cope with an overwhelmed inbox, email subject lines are now summarising in 1 sentence the key content via catchwords, giving people an insight into why one should read/pass by, the full contents in the main mail, where once the subject was optional, an email today, without a subject line, would, most often, be relegated to the bin. New and visually attractive business correspondence templates are available readily online. These help in breaking the monotony of the standards of yore andin attracting attention of the receiver, who is now suffering from an information overload. The business world has taken Covid 19 in its stride and ramped up its communication tools digitally. It is now imperative for us teachers of the subject to emulate. Rarely can pedagogy designed for an offline class, keep up with its online counterpart. 'Indeed.com' is one of the most sought -after sites for gathering corporate friendly business correspondence templates. Without person to person contact either as a prelude to, or as a follow-up to a piece of communication online, there is definitely a chance of mistaken schema, mistaken allusion, mistaken cross cultural references. Should emoticons substitute a smiling or concerned demeanour? Would they creep into formal correspondence gradually? Today these are considered 'unprofessional' and 'informal'. Intuition suggests they will.

Business is also founded on relationships. Words are notorious for being ambiguous depending on context. Long winded communication, especially correspondence, is soon going to be a thing of the past. There could be a 'word limit'/ 'page limit' on communicative content online. Very much like the receiver stipulating the size of the content/attachment she is prepared to accept in her inbox. (Already a feature in Google Forms) In a K-I-S-S (keep it simple and short) format, all communication online is required to be kept concise. This might mean a blurring of semi formal and informal register. Americans have already done away with a lot of formality (not be confused with courteousness) in tone and register of correspondence. While High Context Cultures naturally prefer formality of tone and format; the global trends of virtual communication are more accepting of the w-y-s-i-w-y-g (What you see is what you get). To that end, communication, especially correspondence, is more than open to having 'voice' (colloquiality) influences. Legalese is pertinent where one is negotiating a contract, however, everywhere else, an email may take the place of a 'hello'. Recruitment correspondence, however is a genre in itself and needs special mention with respect to Indian learners. Our learners need to not only be on point as far as their correspondence/resume/CV contents go, they also need to have the ability to stand out from thousands of other candidates' correspondences. Towards that end, their templates require an extra edge. Employable graduates in this part of the world have to compete with a couple of thousands of candidates, all applying for the same post/job. Approximately, 2.4 crore candidates apply for 1.2 lakh vacancies on an average. (7th Nov2019 - https://www.businesstoday.in) [1 crore= 10,000 thousands, 1 lakh=100 thousand] If people had to interview every applicant, each post would take approximately 4 years to fill. There is, therefore, a constant requirement on the part of the teacher as well as the taught to be armed with the most updated, visually appealing of business correspondence so that the application, request, proposal, report, etc does not go to the bin. There is a tendency to 'standardize' content by affiliating bodies of academic institutes. Any template used by the learner and other than that advised by Boards, are wont to be poorly graded by examiners. These Boards require to convene regularly to update their curriculum advisories in keeping with the market trends. Unfortunately, as yet, that is not the case in India. Already there is sufficient diversity regarding an acceptable CV/Resume template designed for a Govt Sector job and a Private Sector job, for the same role. The former is seen as Grades/Marks focussed and Knowledge intensive while the latter is seen as looking for pertinent Skill sets- both hard as well as soft. Visually as well, there are substantial differences in choices of colors and formats. With this disconnect in mind, it is natural for the employment seeking graduate learner to need to style the same contents differently, for the different recruiter profiles. With contactless recruitment modes in place almost everywhere, it is an added

advantage to embed links to one's social media presence, a self-introduction video, blogs, YouTube content generated by oneself, etc. These help to plug the lacunae of envisioning a multidimensional personality from a unidimensional CV/Resume. The use of colours in the CV/Resume template is also an issue in contention. It is not a teaching point in many classrooms. Using colours in a CV are perceived as 'unprofessional' and 'informal'. It is seen as taking away from the seriousness of the candidates' request. However, in the absence of many opportunities to stand out in a virtual crowd, a resume may indeed use professional colours to highlight what is deemed to be important to an applicant in her career trajectory. This is, one believes, an integral component to make one's presence felt in today's challenging recruitment scenario. Visually appealing content draws attention to itself. The days of greyscale templates may be over.

Clarity of content trumps concern for conciseness. Brevity is no more the sole focus. As the second wave of Covid 19 blurs borders once again, professional writing seems to have decided to pivot towards a top down (main information first, context later) composition structure as opposed to the bottom up approach traditionally favoured by high context cultures that India is presumed to be. Traditionally, written communication is preceded by verbal/spoken communication in India, and not the other way around. However, this too seems poised for a change. In a contactless professional space, it is almost the same whether one hears a media enabled voice or reads a media enabled letter. There is however, a space where 'voice' (in written communication) which has hitherto been considered unprofessional, may gradually be allowed in acceptably. This is to compensate for the physical distancing mandatory in these times. In the incorporation of colloquialisms, and a replication of phrases denoting emotion, it is assumed that the correspondence will strike a chord in the receiver, enough to be persuaded.

Redefining 'kinaesthetics: In a virtual world-In the absence of the body (virtual screen presence notwithstanding), the handshake and the namaskar are almost redundant in corporate greeting. (Unless one is fortunate to have a full screen display of oneself) When a personable presenter presents a presentation in PowerPoint, the visual and kinaesthetic connect is automatically present. The same cannot be said when one uses Meet's 'present now' feature. Therefore, the slides have to extra appealing visually and the presenters' paralanguage is required to be on point. Colour, layout, content, transition as well as embedded animation have become more important in Covid19 times. The presenter can only be heard, not seen. Hence, the slides need to have their own life. Data intensive content is to be made engaging via statistical tools and pictograms that analyse and present. Charts, graphs, are required to be colour coded for easy comprehension and attention retention. Animation of data substitutes the missing anime of the presenter.

Telephone Etiquette: In these pandemic times, calls are the substitute of visits. Business calls, just like business visits, are ideally by prior appointment. This applies to video calls as well. Care is taken to make one's appearance as well as the frame of screen, as professional as possible. Meet and Zoom have offered a 'blur background' option that is a boon to many WFH-ers. In a country where, culturally, 'formal' and 'professional' are not always words used in compliments, it is difficult to teach these in the virtual classroom. An email is still considered brusque and distant by many. It is the poor, distant cousin of the telephone call. India, like South East Asia is a high context, high PDI (Power Distance Index) country. It is also a country where the leitmotif of relationships is 'Vasudaiva Kutumbakam'. The world is one family. 'Talking', 'going over', exchange of non-business information, interest in family ties etc are the bases for many successful negotiations, conflict resolution. Pitches are not made in the elevator, but in one's home, over a home cooked meal. Masking (non-visualization of smile) and contactless communication in these Covid19 times is forcing a reimagining of codes. In order to substitute for that ephemeral something that is present only in one's 'presence', is it possible that one could make emoticons acceptable in business communication? Clasped hands, thinking, happy exasperation, etc all seem appropriate substitutions of one's inability to give physical cues of kinesics. On screen, hand on the heart,

leaning in, raised hands, (already a feature in Meet)are conscious/subliminal cues to the receiver of communication.

Paralanguage: The common markers of paralanguage, i.e. kinaesthetics, is somewhat relegated to a blurred background in the age of screen to screen communication of the post Covid times. There is only a limited exposure to the 'persona' when one is online. Emoticons, or emojis (itself a Japanese word – 'moji' meaning - word, in Japanese) are forecasted to play a richer role even in formal communication going forward. It would perhaps compensate for the lack of/masked facial expressions of the communicators. With significant heterogeneity in gestures of acceptance/denial etc even within India, not to mention across the world, emoticons are a somewhat homogenous communicative tool. Where words and their usage may be subject to miscommunication and/or ambiguous interpretation because of unclear contexts, emoticons may prove to the next great leveller, after English, as far as communication is concerned. This would then be a paradigm shift in communication across the country as also the world; somewhat akin to the hieroglyphical communication of ancient Egyptians or cave painting communications of the cave-people. This is, however, not to diminish in any way the pertinence of the written/spoken word. Like Blended Teaching-Learning, post Covid Communication could indeed be blended, with the symbols co-existing with the alphabets. This would mitigate to a sufficient degree, the need for understanding correct context, culture, or schema of communicators. One has not yet computed the entire impact of this pandemic (Covid19) on Communication as the world is as yet in the process of surviving it from one day to the next. In this scenario, the experiences and reflections on the subject at present, are personal and lived, for the most part, and augmented by colleagues' views. There is, as yet, not much in-depth academic research into the transitions that have taken place in the domain of post Covid Communication, and hence little to draw inspiration from. However, with a pronounced increase in stringent border controls and lockdowns, one would not be very surprised to find a reversal of the forces of globalisation, triggering off in its wake, a decentralization of Business Communication, hitherto predominantly governed by Western (American) protocols and the language English.

Protocols in A Zoom-Meeting/Video Conference (VC): Though video conferences are the most popular meeting substitutes in Covid 19 times, 'turn taking' is a veritable challenge. Not all meetings are efficiently moderated. It is not desirable that business meets become Arnab Goswami's chat/ news show. The tiled format on the screen affords little space for anyone to be visualized well. It is also easy to dominate or use exclusionary tactics in the Meet, by muting others or removing others, if one is the Organizer. The 'private chat room' feature enables back-channel communication between selected persons thereby reducing transparency of dealings. Till Covid 19 enforced 'the screen' on all of us, meetings were considered public modes of business communication. Kinaesthetic cues are next to non-existent in a VC, hence the spoken word is the only content being disseminated and is open to interpretation. In a cross-cultural context, an unscripted and unmoderated VC is poised to fail to achieve its objectives if it takes place between Easterners and Westerners of the world. Easterners are culturally assumed to be 'respectfully meek' while the Westerners are culturally assumed to be 'confidently assertive'. Management of this barrier would entail the presence of a consensually appointed moderator who would manage the discourse, the turn taking and cue the cultural codes in case of a potential mismatch. This can be done perhaps by allocating sufficient screen space to all members of the Meet and ensuring each member feels adequately respected. Management of time in video conferences is also of importance. Chronemics and its efficient expression are often seen as a language of mutual respect and collaboration. Avoiding technical delays and planning for data outages by having backups in place is the way forward for many of us endeavouring to offer a seamless professional experience online. Conversely too, chronemics has the potential of being used to dominate, establish hierarchy, and generally, as a negotiation tool. Exiting a meeting abruptly and not rejoining is analogous to a 'walkout'.

Listening: In data challenged semi urban and rural Indian contexts, professional listening suffers due to data outages, 'call drops', and media buffering due to slow connectivity. Appropriate responses to such events are not, 'pardon?'/'sorry?' anymore. 'Your voice is breaking', 'please check your connection', 'sorry but I am losing you', 'I apologize for the patchy connection, could you please repeat that?' are some of the new phrases that have contributed to post- Covid jargon.

Speaking: Spoken communication, for the most part, has become intensively technology dependant in the post Covid times. What was once a very hands-on, or should one phrase it as 'face time based' connects, has devolved into an email/voice message/ con call intensive communication. As Covid enforces worldwide masking, the ability to express feelings through smiles, frowns, etc as a augmentative accompaniments to the spoken communication has been all but absent. In these situations, spoken communication may have lost some of its spontaneity, immediacy, and holistic impact. However, the hands and body could take over from the communicative inadequacies caused by the masked face. The folded hands gesture/greeting of the Indian subcontinent (namaste), has been widely embraced as a substitute to the Hello handshake prevalent worldwide as a corporate greeting. Speed of communication is slower and spaced out, to account for the internet lag, and is embellished with hand gestures wherever permissible and to the extent applicable. Listening, an integral part of speaking, (it is shown to be of 45% importance in communication-Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L. -and Proctor, R. 2001) and is facilitated by fewer distractions during a technology dependant conversation. This is simply because the two communicators have nothing else to be distracted by, during a device dependant communicative interaction, except for seeing each other on the screens. Their ambience is strictly curated and structured for focussed communication. Is this always a good thing? One is not sure, because sometimes, the ambience contributes to the acceptability of one's discourse/deliberations. There are definitely concrete reasons why most mergers and acquisitions were once formalised in scenic resorts. Emotions or feelings are summarily edited out of most device dependant communication, as we grapple with the pure logic and reasoning of our perspectives. There is little way, as one was wont to put it, to 'sweeten the deal'. While cross cultural communication across different countries have always been mostly, virtual, Indians have a difficult time accepting the screen as one's colleague/partner/communicatee. Communication neither feels complete nor satisfactory. Gestures, politeness markers, respect markers are, as it were, absent from the online connect simply because one has to be mindful of the camera, and be 'within the frame'. Researchers are not yet sure if Indian communicators are at peace with their Zoom/Meet connects. It is not uncommon to feel incompletely 'listened to' during a con call, either because of time constraints or of data. Eye contact, a crucial signifier of communicative competence, is also difficult to achieve as there are few of us who remember to look at the camera of one's device and not the screen image of the person that we are communicating with. As opposed to a face to face connect, an online connect leaves us at a loss of arranging our 'frames' competently, and managing our body, (or whatever is visible of it). It appears to be an additional strain, a deliberate exercise lacking in spontaneity. Speaking has been the preferred way of communication in the business world for a major part of the last century, and 'screen time' is not yet a robust substitute. Content that is augmented by music and visuals are preferred to simple verbal communications. Teaching an online class, also, is presentation centric. Videos are par for course as far as transfer of information is concerned. In fact, one would not be surprised to one day, find audio-visual research papers disseminating/deliberating findings on distinctive domains. MS Word files would be what manuscripts once was, the undesirable poor cousin.

Importance of 'Team Skills 'in a contactless world: Video Conferences apart, WFH does not entail any major physical or kinaesthetic team skill requirements. There are no 'water cooler' moments or its equivalent in Indian cafeterias anymore. Concerns of confidentiality or the lack thereof have prompted colleagues to be very careful of their written chats. In a country like India where many of us fear retrenchment if lockdowns are reimposed, it is essentially each man for himself. This is not conducive for a display of team skills. However, in the hope of normal times once again, one feels that inculcating team

skills in generation next is essential. Hence, VCs could become boot camps where buddies work together, albeit virtually. Business Communication games need to reorient their format and become compatible to the digital mode. Google calendar may be intuitively used to set reminders of virtual cafeteria moments and inculcate the camaraderie that could be harnessed in difficult task times.

Conflict Management: Professional conflicts are a result of disagreeing points of view and/or work decisions. While physical distance does seem to motivate people to be more accepting and adjusting of each other's perspectives, there could be a strong sense of opposing philosophies at the crux of the agenda of communication. It may appear equally easy or difficult to manage conflicts on a virtual platform. Easy in that one does not have to deal with the opposing colleague's persona. Difficult in that kinaesthetic cues of conciliation are not applicable. The written/spoken word has to suffice. This is where one would like to suggest that emoticons and 'voice' interventions are often the way forward in conflict resolution. In case of a very rationally composed piece of communication, the receiver sometimes has no option but to acquiesce. Facts take precedence over feelings. A SWOT of the situation under contention would require all concerned parties engaged in the conflict to focus on the common goal of primarily looking for best outcomes. Personal feelings may be relegated to the background initially, as everyone looks equal on paper. Back channels of communication may be useful to get an update on what the real issue is, if at all, there is a possibility of underlying tensions. In these situations, not having to sit across each other while resolving conflicts may be a veritable boon. Whatspp groups or email groups have an advantage in this area that every communication is transparently available to all stake holders to individually respond to. Contactless conflict management in the professional zone may actually have a few advantages after all. Emotions do not fly off the handle and no blood is spilled, so to say. On the other hand, at an intensely personal level, the Indian psyche is not emotionally geared to handle remote problem-solving. One normally sits down face to face for an interaction, usually mediated by an elder. Therefore, in organizations that are familial, remote negotiation and persuasion efforts may not yield desired outcomes.

Impact of Covid On 'Brand Promotions: Marketing has been hit by the ensuing pandemic not only economically but also geographically. Vendors are now fighting for a space on the customers' screen. Every other 'location' of positioning promotionals is today redundant. Only those with no screen presences and those whose clients are without screen presences promote on billboards. One can promote onscreen for a fraction of the budget required for physical bill boarding. The challenges as well as advantages of screen promotionals are numerous. Challenges include multiple products using the same space in rapid succession. Attention is not fully held for substantial decision making time. When the promotionals interrupt interesting content, the customer skips ads. Since diverse companies engage in funding content, their promotionals are quite diverse and even at times, out of sync with each other. When the promotionals are out of sync with the main content they are sponsoring, the customer reaction to the product may even be adverse. However, advantages abound as well. Screen advertising is one's best expression of multisensory creativity. In a 2 second advert, if one manages to tell a story, make the customer actually stay with the advert for the entire duration, and sometimes share the content with other users as well, then that is a 'win'. Creating such content requires use of multimedia in intuitive ways that do not overwhelm the customer with technology and retain the soul of the message. It is not therefore surprising to see Brut advertisements, Tata and Amul promotionals, etc have more brand recall than most others. Language too, is a differentiator. India is not a land of homogenous linguistic capabilities. No one language will touch a billion pockets or hearts simultaneously. Hence a story told without any specific language, using only a suitable background score and emotionality of the actors often become more successful in influencing marketing decisions than anything else. YouTube is a booming space for digital advertising and even when this pandemic is over, will continue to dominate. A flip side to the boom in viewership of YouTube videos is that attention span of digital audience has whittled down further, along with the requirement of content requiring to be multisensory in order to be impactful.

Digital Advertising: It has grown exponentially (valued at 235 billion as on 17th may2021-https//www.statista.com). Indeed, marketing, promotions, acquisitions of material goods are some of the few sectors of business communication that have actually received a turbo boost in the post pandemic times. Brevity, clarity and ease of UI, are the newest criteria of effective communication. Attention spans are at an all-time low. (earlier at 30 secs… are now at 12/8 secs.Per Microsoft conducted study on 14th Jul2020)(muckrack.com/blog/2020/0) The average attention span of a goldfish is estimated to be at 9 secs. Indeed, one believes that Augmented Reality (immersive experiences) is where the future of Digital Marketing is at.

Generation of 'Post Covid Jargon: One cannot but start off with the first phrase that Covid 19 has taught/brought us – being 'positive' is a bad thing! What was once considered just a meeting is now a Meet with the added qualification needed of whether it is 'in person' or not. Then one has the mistaken phrase of 'social distancing' which would ideally have been 'physical distancing' (one is not expected to isolate mentally, but physically, in order to stop the spread). While business jargon traditionally embraces an 'upsurge', a crest, a rising curve on their hypothetical balance sheets, the predominant focus worldwide now is to 'flatten the curve'. The term 'frontline workers', 'survivors', 'lockdown', 'new normal' dominate our vocabulary. 'Covidiot' is not a formal word yet, but getting there fast. WFH, Zoom bombing, and 'network issues' are fast queuing up for a formalised acceptance in the leading dictionaries. One hopes that the red zigzagged lines that occur when one types these words in a word document today, will soon be a thing of the past.

Data devices and communication platforms are not only doing great business, they are innovating /evolving faster than usual. Teaching tools alone have grown in their market share substantially, in the last couple of years. The Big Blue Button, Learn Cube, Electa Live, Adobe Connect, WizIQ, Black Board, Bamboo Paper, Openboard, etc are some of the popular software available for use. Interactive devices have facilitated teacher-taught communication to a considerable extent. It is this Online Machinery, as it were, that has kept the education scene in a continuum even when lockdowns have enforced populations to be confined to their living spaces. The app industry has doubled its growth in the past year itself, from 28% in the domain of Education, to 50% presently (source-https://www.dotcominfoway.com/blog/rise-of-mobile-apps-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak-infographic/). Statista (statista.com) places the online education market at 1.96 billion dollars in 2021, raised from 0.25, in 2016. With Covid19 showing no signs of abating anytime soon, the projection for 2024 is at an approx. 14 bn USD.

This has happened not only because of Covid related online education during lockdowns but also to cater to needs of upskilling for job losers in various fields. The pandemic has simply 'displaced' a whole section of 'in person' jobs. The impact of these novel situations has been felt in the field of technical-device-dependant communication as well. 'Reverse mentoring' of senior technocrats by their tech savvy juniors is now more commonplace than ever. Professional respect is mostly for technology creators and users as the 'old world of interpersonal skills' gives way to better D2D (device to device) communication. Downloads and uploads substitute 'sending' and 'receiving' of the erstwhile Shannon Weaver Model of Business Communication. The only barrier is technological in nature. Feelings and cultural contexts are marginal in impact and interpretation. Miscommunication is somewhat obsolete. There is an enforced global homogeneity of the business correspondence format of most channels of corporate communication. What is unsaid is unimplied and unenforceable. Trail mails are important resources for record keeping. Equally endangered is all communication in case of an internet outage. Data loss is akin to a ELE (Extinction Level Event) in a business cycle. Has 'word of mouth' (WOM) taken a hit? Undoubtedly. One is always asked to send/refer to, an email/presentation on a point of discussion. It is as though the paradigm of business communication has tectonically shifted to what is tangible, rather than what is also, 'in between the lines'.

The paper proposed to take a look at the kind of communicative changes that have happened post covid19. The focus has been to track, note and study the differences that are pronounced in our business communication-from the 4 media of communication (LSRW) to the words that evolved new connotations, to also, the economic impact of the exponential rise of virtual communication. While still at a fairly nascent stage, there are undeniable shifts in terms of media, language, protocols as well as paralanguage (or its irrelevance thereof), in post Covid world of Business English Communication /Communication (in English) for Business.

Trends that forecast the future of virtual communication may safely be said to predict an increased use of pre-determined templates available on apps that would require only gap filling of information. A personal predict is for a formalised usage of emoticons in formal communication, to compensate for physical distancing. Visual and aural information encapsulated in byte sized silos will, in all probability, be vastly preferred to lengthy, verbose academic deliberations on any given idea. This will feed into an already shrinking adult attention span. Most business communication is set to be multisensory and media dependant. In a world that is perhaps going to be more often than not, contained indoors, augmented reality and VFX would require to create immersive communicative experiences.

Art has already taken this path through intelligent, interactive museums and galleries transforming 2 dimensional creations into experiential media of communication.

The resume has already become a 'videolet', other recruitment correspondences could soon follow suit. With rising awareness and equity of gender and other identity markers, it would be a matter of time before all these differentiators would cease to exist. Would communication be more nuanced or direct? Would there be a segregation of personal and professional usages of language as WFH becomes a norm? With the needs of business communication increasingly spilling over into one's physical as well as metaphorical 'personal space' there is perhaps a time that one is going to live through where this distinction of 2 separate classes of registers is going to lose significance. Again, a personal prediction, that format, and not content, will be king.

An integral part of Business Communication today, is Soft Skills. Defined as communication through kinaesthetics and integrity markers, would it retain its pertinence? One should hope so, even if the haptic and proxemics content loses its relevance in times of physical distancing. In times of device dependant communication, perhaps, appropriate Netiquette, would be the main concern. In a time of inability to physically verify a lot of commitments made verbally, integrity and ethicality would be the passwords for continued brand recall and business growth.

Are Language Laboratories/ Practical classes required anymore, as components in the Business Communication syllabus? Conversely, are theoretical inputs on Language, apart from rudimentary grammar at the basic level, pertinent to the teaching of the subject? Since the source of all teaching is the screen, the differentiators in the typical syllabus of English (of Th/P/L hrs) are perhaps redundant. The evaluators of Business Communication need to evolve and generate new parameters of assessment. These definitely require incorporation of Interactive Communication Tests like the erstwhile GD/PI/etc. In addition, the need of the hour would be to train and assess for Conflict Management, Negotiation, and Training in the virtual mode.

In order to test these hypotheses among colleagues at different professional levels, a survey was designed on Google Form and conducted through email. Respondees were users of communication for management and training/teaching, at different service levels.

Bridging the Communication Gap: Teaching moved online; so as, institutes with preexisting good digital infrastructure and culture were able to adapt faster and better. It did help that big technological companies also played their part. For example, Google relaxed regulations so that tools like Google meet

could be used by anyone with an email account. As such most higher education institutes and urban schools were quickly able to move on to digital platforms for teaching. However, rural schools, on the wrong side of India's digital divide, were severely affected, so much so that education delivery was practically non-existent in the early phases of Covid-19 induced lockdown. Even if teachers took their lectures online, many students missed out on lessons simply because they did not have access to digital equipment and/or internet. In the early lockdown phases of March 2020, only 32.24% of rural population had internet subscription compared to over 99% of urban India.

Many public digital centres, which such strata of the population heavily relied on for digital requirements in pre Covid -19 times, were also not operating due to lockdown. Communication in general and education in particular had come to a standstill for such portions of the population. Forced by the needs of times, many people invested in internet devices and internet connections. Many state governments tried to bridge the gap by providing tablets/ money in lieu of to the needy students. Despite this, the rural subscription increased by 5% only in two years. The pandemic has fast tracked digital innovation and consumption in our country. Many business ventures have taken their products to e-commerce platforms and even started their own websites for survival. There has been a spurt in the sales of electronic devices and online payment systems have got new users. In the lockdown period, wireless data usage per subscriber per month went up by 3.73 GB, a near 34% growth. Yet, it cannot be denied that the pandemic has left the digital-data challenged strata of the population behind. The way forward then is to improve digital access for one and all as uninterrupted education and continued economic growth can only be sustained through digital expansion.

Ethical Concerns Regarding Working Offline (WFH): How long is one expected to be 'at work' in a WFH situation? Is it even ethical to be asked to work from home? The terms home and office are contradictory to the best of one's knowledge and have different standard codes of attire and conduct. However, one is expected to conjure up an office inside the home, avoid Zoom fails and deliver. There is expected to be the same formality, committedness and focussed work from home as would have been from office and for the exact duration while being acceptable to longer hours and round the clock responsiveness because after all one is at home. The home office and the do not disturb signs fail to isolate family commitments and needs. There is overlap and often not pretty ones. In India, simply grateful to still be on the payroll, people (Teachers included) continue to be on command and control well past office/college hours, in an attempt to overcompensate the lack of physical presence.

Challenges Regarding Data Safety While Teaching: Another serious concern that accompanied teaching on virtual platforms was the issue of privacy and data safety. Increased Phishing, Denial of Service (Dos) and "bombing" of private meetings were reported worldwide. In India, registered cybercrime shot up by 11.8% in 2020 over 2019. These hampered the overall safety and sanctity of classroom atmospheres. Moreover, the personal data of students and teachers are now facing greater exposure to corporate tracking and other misuses. Rushed and indiscriminate adoption of online platforms has only aggravated the problem. Some measures like strong and unique passwords for different online accounts are easy to follow. Others like allowing only authorized personnel to attend virtual classrooms require more technological assistance. Institutions should therefore invest more time and money on developing institution specific teaching platforms, improving online security and best practices awareness and verifying online products before introducing them to classroom teaching.

Conclusion

The survey intended to elicit responses from professionals working from home and their desire to continue using technology to communicate. As the responses show, most of the respondees are very comfortable with their ongoing processes. For reasons apart from technological ease too, WFH ers do not want to return to offline communication/work. The only question that did strike a dissonant note was that

of team management and conflict management. It appears to be a common area of challenge to not be comfortable engaging with colleagues through only technology when there are issues pending to be resolved. Technology in communication is then, here to stay. What started as a 'stop gap trouble shooting' endeavour of trying to keep the economy in motion while the virus could contain has indeed become the 'preferred way' of conducting business. Speed, ease and privacy in communication coupled with compartmentalization of one's personal and professional lives have empowered the modern professional to deliver their best from their own comfort zones.

Teaching Business Communication today therefore, needs to focus more on device based communication, and less on the lengthy written stylized content of the yore. Digital Communication ensures full inboxes, overflowing gallery and storage limits breached at all times, already.

Hence the new normal demands crispness of content, contractions legitimized, eloquence sacrificed for the sake of unambiguous lucidity and erring on the side of ethically correct even if it requires being contrived and clichéd. Teachers are required to train to be technocrats and be well versed in 'business speaks' while incorporating jargon in communication. English/Business Communication teachers have taken covid19 by its horns (or spikes?) and made it into a game changer in terms of formats acceptable for business transactions. Could this herald a new era of communication, 2.0?

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Appendix

Google Form Survey Responses in Tabular Format
Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Respondent	Occupation	Organizational Role
1	Service	Senior Level
2	Senior Management SAIL Steel	Senior Level
3	service	Senior Level
4	DOS CELT Athens	Senior Level
5	Engineering student	Junior Level
6	Asst. Professor of English	Mid-Level
7	Service	Senior Level
8	Student	Junior Level
9	Teaching	Junior Level
10	Data Scientist	Mid-Level
11	Teaching	Mid-Level
12	Assistant Professor	Senior Level
13	Service	Senior Level
14	Professor	Senior Level
15	Service	Senior Level
16	Technical Assistant	Junior Level
17	Teaching	Senior Level
18	Assistant professor	Mid-Level
19	Teaching	Mid-Level
20	Service	Mid-Level
21	Business	Senior Level
22	Banker	Mid-Level

Table 2: Pre and post Covid-19 shift in Communication structure

Questions	Top response	2nd response	Others
Typical communication channels used pre covid	Face to face (72.7%)	Conference/Seminar (9.1%)+ Email (9.1%)	Telephone(4.5%) + Others(4.5%)
Typical communication channels used since March 2020	Zoom/ Meet etc.(72.7%)	Other remote methods (22.8)	Face to face (4.5%)]
Do you feel anything different in terms of ease of communicating for business?	Yes (68.2)	No (18.2%)	Can't say (9.1) + maybe (4.5)
Do you prefer pre-covid communication mode?	Yes (59.1)	No (22.7)	No difference (13.6) + maybe (4.6)
Why?	Miss the physical connect	Enjoy the remote ease of communicating from personal space	No difference
Online communication is	Easier than real time communication (50%)	More difficult than real time communication (45.5%)	same (4.5%)

How many times do you call people over telephone to communicate now?	More than before March 2020 (50%)	Same as before March 2020 (31.8)	Less than pre March 2020, virtual communication is enough (18.2%)
How do you feel about Emails?	Inbox overloaded with too many mails everyday (40.9 %)	Requires immediate attention(27.3%)	Very formal means of communication (22.7%) + Others (9.1%)
How do you feel about YouTube videos?	Useful means of communication (50%)	Informal means of communication (22.7)	Multisensory and thereforeextremely engaging and influential (18.2%) + Others (9.1%)
How do you rate the usefulness of emoticons in business communication?	Should be avoided (54.5%)	Should be formalized and encouraged (27.3)	Others (18.2%)
Do you and your peers use them?	Maybe, a little (54.5%)	No, not at all (27.3%)	Yes, a lot (18.2%)
Do you use word compressions like LOL/BTW/TTYL etc?	No (68.2%)	Yes (18.2%)	Maybe, a little (13.6%)
Do you feel the written word conveys your full content of communication?	Maybe, there is a little scope formisunderstanding the context (63.6%)	Yes (31.8%)	No (4.5%)
How do you manage conflict virtually?	Meet/Zoom (40.9%)	Con call/Video call (27.3%)	Sit across each other and talk things out (13.6%) + Others (18.2%)
Handling Teams is better	In-person (81.8%)	Virtually (9.1%)	No difference (9.1%)
You struggled to adapt technically during online WFH?	No (63.6%)	Yes (18.2%)	A little (18.2%)
Would you prefer to continue working and communicating online?	Maybe on a case by case basis (50%)	Yes (40.9%)	No (9.1%)