

MARKOS-KUJBUS ÉVA, CSORDÁS TAMÁS: University students' visual self-reflections about their experiences of emergency virtual learning

Abstract

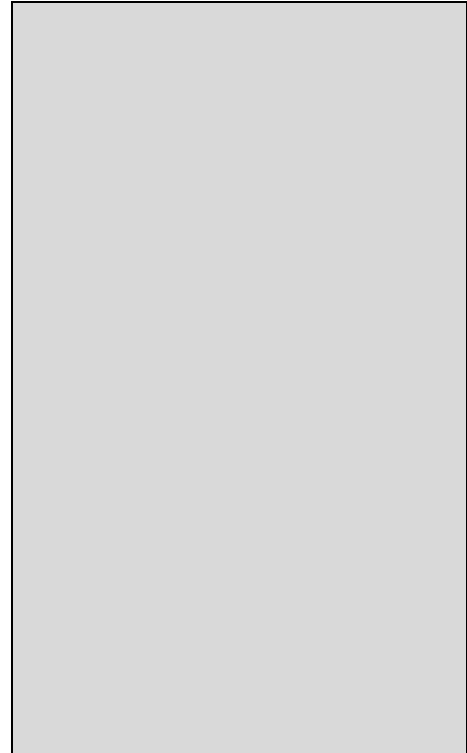
The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a widespread shift to online education around the world. Educational institutions were forced to adapt rapidly to this new situation, when the space of education moved from the classroom to online video meetings, message boards and learning management platforms, making it impossible to use the traditional teaching methods and tools. By 2021 there are university students who have mostly or exclusively participated in online higher education thereby making online classes “a new normal”. Yet, a lot remains to be learnt about institutionalized virtual education which is far from the concept of distance education as envisioned by its proponents. Our paper builds on the theory of emergency education, which, however, was developed for crises such as wars and natural disasters. We therefore also review the literature on the peculiar manifestations of emergency education during the COVID-19 crisis with an emphasis on how students experienced and coped with this situation and whether it can be considered “the new normal”. Our empirical study examines university students’ reactions to and own experiences about the virtual university environment through visual self-presentations. Participating students (n1=184) (all in various majors related to marketing) were asked to take part in a “virtual Instagram exhibition” by uploading a series of “Instagram-compatible” pictures (n2=1131) that best expressed their current feelings and experiences related to their education in the Spring semester of 2021. A qualitative visual content analysis was then performed on the uploaded pool of images (grouped into 184 collages). We examined the micro-environment of participants’ learning spaces (home and device screens as learning spaces) and the macro environment of their manifested educational relationship to the university. The micro-environment is studied through the appearance of persons, objects, and appearing/visualized phenomena. The forms of appearance of the university were also examined. Our results show that the online learning space seems only to offer a somewhat conditional communication interface with the university and a lack of direct physical contact / space between the student and the

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institution was observed. Learning is manifested through educational materials, and screens of classes (sometimes live, sometimes pre-recorded), while student feedback in the sample seems only conditional, manifested in the sample mainly through assignments but at the same time a lack of visual presence (e.g. turned off cameras). Parallel to the visually represented crisis situations, this foreshadows a hinderance of student performance in terms of online learning effectiveness. Our study sheds light on the crucial importance of well-being of students in their learning environment on their effectiveness and results and therefore in becoming a better-suited and -motivated workforce. The sustainability of traditional and novel higher education practices in business studies is therefore discussed.

Keywords: Higher education, Emergency distance education, Virtual learning environment, Post-COVID-19, Computer screen as learning space, Online learning effectiveness





2. szekció | Marketing stratégia – márképítés

