



An Assessment of Covid-19 Impact on Business Communication Mode Transformation and Re-Skilling Learning Approaches

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ABSTRACT:

Business Communication encompasses the usage of various offline and online modes to ensure smooth flow of communication in every direction in an organization. Online and offline communications are interdependent and complimentary. However, the advent of COVID 19 pandemic has made a drastic shift from the offline to the online medium of communication. The usage of online and social media platforms by various business organizations has come to the forefront. The aim of this study is to highlight the usage of offline and online mediums before the pandemic and the radical shift from offline to the online medium that had taken place due to the pandemic. Trend and comparative analyses of online communication usage during pre and post COVID-19 period (i.e., from 2013 to April 2021) have also been assessed and the subsequent changes in re-skilling learning approaches of employees during the post COVID 19 era are also explored in depth.

KEYWORDS: Business Communication, COVID-19 Pandemic, Offline, Online, Re-skilling Learning Approach

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I. INTRODUCTION

The word communication has been derived from the Latin word 'Communis' that means 'common', which consequently implies common understanding. It is understood as a process of exchange of thoughts, feelings, ideas, emotions etc. to create common understanding among people. (Meaning and process of communication) The business communication encapsulates the various forms of communication mediums widely prevalent in organizations to achieve its organizational and commercial aims and objectives. The business communication has undergone drastic changes from the pre-COVID-19 pandemic era to the post COVID 19 time period. In this regard, the numbers of global usages of some popular online social media platforms have been observed tremendously increased from pre to post pandemic times. Apart from that, the more emphasize on online communication mode usage in the business organization has reshaped their respective employees skill development approaches in post pandemic period. (Susanto, H., et al., 2021)

With this backdrop, the aim of this research study is to assess the underlying transformation of business communication mode from offline to online mediums that have taken place in almost all organizations across the globe and its subsequent employee re-skilling learning approaches in post pandemic time. The paradigm shift from the real life face to face interactions to virtual interactions has become a new normal. The COVID-19 crisis may fade sooner or later but the online mode of business communication is likely to supersede its counterpart, i.e., offline organizational communication.

II. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study has been divided into four parts:

- (1) To highlight business communication concept including both offline and online mediums
- (2) To understand the impact of COVID-19 on global business communication mode – a shift from offline to online during 2019-20

- (3) To assess trend and comparative analyses of online communication usage from 2013 to 2021 (January-April)
(4) To analyze online communication based re-skilling learning approaches taken by companies for their employees during post pandemic era.

III. METHODOLOGY

The sources of information, i.e. necessary data for analysis have been collected from the 'Our World in Data' secondary data set, businessofapps.com and statista.com. After collecting and compiling of all these secondary data, the compiled data set is thoroughly studied, made standardize for analysis and interpretation. In this regard, seven well-known online social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WeChat, Sina Weibo, WhatsApp, and YouTube have been selected to analyze. Subsequently, a trend analysis has been performed based on number of people using these social media platforms globally during 2013-2018 to January-April 2021. Besides that, a comparative analysis has been carried out of these seven online communication platforms global usages between 2018 and January-April 2021. In addition, a percentage growth comparison had been performed among all seven online social media platforms between 2008 and January-April 2021. Consequently, interpretation has been prepared to validate the results.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The observation and interpretation based on earlier research studies and the current analyzed data with subsequent results have been explained into four parts. Part I describes the study on business communication concept including offline and online mediums. Part II discusses the impact of COVID-19 on global business communication and the consequent drastic shift from offline to online mode during 2019-20. Part III describes the trend and comparative analyses of online communication usage of some selected popular online media platforms during pre and post COVID-19 period, i.e., from 2013 to April 2021 and Part IV highlights the subsequent online communication based re-skilling learning approaches adopted by companies for their employees during post pandemic.

IV.I. BUSINESS COMMUNICATION CONCEPT INCLUDING OFFLINE AND ONLINE MEDIUMS

The business communication is a method in which a commercial organization prepares its employees to increase the productivity and simultaneously, aims to achieve its business objectives through practicing effective, transparent and efficient way of communication within its workforce. It usually encompasses the job responsibilities, hierarchies and various channels of communication. Traditionally, business communication channels include different types of components such as written communication, face to face interactions, communication over telephone, communication through media, and electronic communication. The written channels of communication include letters, memos, circulars, notice, agenda etc. Similarly, the face to face interaction is the oldest and most useful channel of communication that is used within an organization since ancient times. It is considered as the most effective channel of communication specifically for conveying important and emotional messages directly to the workforce, which in turn can provide instantaneous feedback and scope for clarification. Besides that, newspapers, magazines, television and radio –all are broadcasting mediums and they generally provide a platform for the promotion of new products. Due to the advancement of technology, the advent of mobile phone has changed the business communication concept significantly. In this context, communication through mobile phones is recognized widely prevalent as it saves time. In addition to that, the emergence of several electronic communication mediums including electronic mail (email), intranet and social media platforms and scientifically designed apps like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WeChat, SINAWEIBO, WhatsApp and YouTube, to name a few, have been transforming the conventional concept of business communication. As a result, a large number of business organizations across the globe have currently preferred to use them more in numbers. In terms of possessing vast commercial significance, all these social media platforms can be used for both personal and group communication among employees and management, and also used for external communication with stakeholders of the organization. Subsequently, through all these social media platforms, any individual or business organization can promote products, brands, carrying out advertisements etc. (Williams, O., 2019)

IV.II. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GLOBAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: DRASTIC SHIFT FROM OFFLINE TO ONLINE MODE DURING 2019-20

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent worldwide lockdown during 2020 had severely disrupted the normal lives and business activities globally. The widespread lockdown across countries had significantly minimized chances of physical interaction and simultaneously, posed new challenges to every sphere of daily activities including carrying out effective business communication. To cope up with the crisis of being connected, a drastic shift had started taking place from offline to online communication modes. As a

result, a variety of online platforms emerged to fill the need to communicate both externally and internally while without being present physically at a particular location. For instance, several software and applications like Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, DROPBOX, One drive, Microsoft 365, etc., have quickly gained momentum with increasing popularity through their usages. All these online platforms register wide range of service related operations such as group communication through calls, messaging, videoconferencing, and uploading, downloading and storage of files etc. In a nutshell, the online platforms provide all types of conceivable facilities to communicate through oral and written modes mainly for carrying on day to day business activities with ease and efficiency. (Susanto, H., et al., 2021)

Before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, both offline and onlinemodes of communication channels made their vivid presence through internal and external communication ways within any business organization. However, the aggravating gravity of pandemic specifically since March 2020 had compelled almost all the commercial organizations in the world to take the initiative to shift their offline mode of business communication to online type. Consequently, the usages of several social apps have been observed in practice. In this connection, multifarious online social media platforms are available with having different features that make it easy for subscribers to perform business activities. Almost all the COVID-19 hit governments in the world and private commercial organizations had come to the forefront in terms of depending solely on the usage of social media applications during the crisis period. (Susanto, H., et al., 2021)

As per the research study, since the commencement of worldwide lockdown in 2020, the usage of some well-known social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, to name a few, have considerably been increased in the commercial fraternity to carry out effective business communication. For example, group calls involving three or more participants are commonly used by the members of an organization for functional coordination. Similarly, text messages are very much used in all the above-mentioned platforms to share important information about their work status, files, documents, contacts and so on. The application of video conferencing facilities had also registered a substantial growth due to the restrictions imposed on physical meet ups. The start up organizations had frequently used social media apps to promote their brands and products and simultaneously, it had helped them to gain popularity and achieve success during the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, the organizations had established customer service desks that were entrusted with the responsibility of reverting to customer feedback on different online platforms. The development of new contacts with suppliers and intermediaries had been carried out through using these online media platforms as well.

In tune with the fact, the usage of YouTube had shown significant increase during the phase of COVID-19 lockdown. A plethora of tutorials and videos on health care, education, cooking, gardening, healthy lifestyle, financial management, usage of various apps etc. had become immensely popular on YouTube. For example, as per the Intensive Care Society (ICS), which is recognised as the representative organization in the United Kingdom mainly for intensive care professionals and patients and also the oldest society for critical care medicine in the globe, the YouTube views had significantly increased for the ICS online events during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Figure 1). Similarly, the European Society of Intensive Care Medicine (ESICM), an independent, non-profit organization that founded in Geneva in March 1982, had shown the substantial number of viewers using YouTube, Facebook, and Website to view COVID-19 related ESICM online events during the pandemic. (Figure 2). (Wong, A., et al. 2020)

Figure 1
Number of YouTube Viewers Registered for Intensive Care Society (ICS) Online Events during the COVID-19 Pandemic

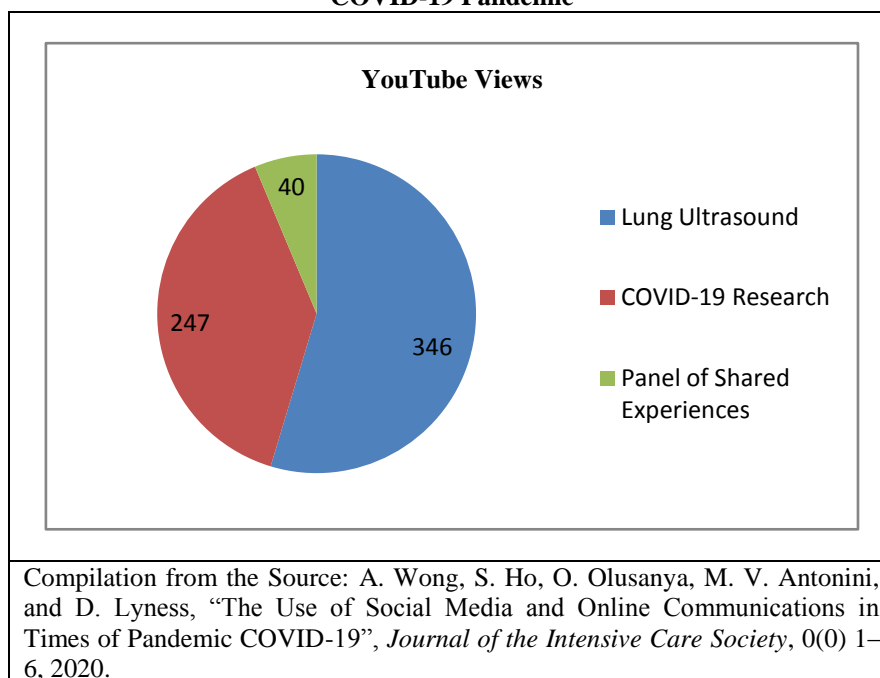
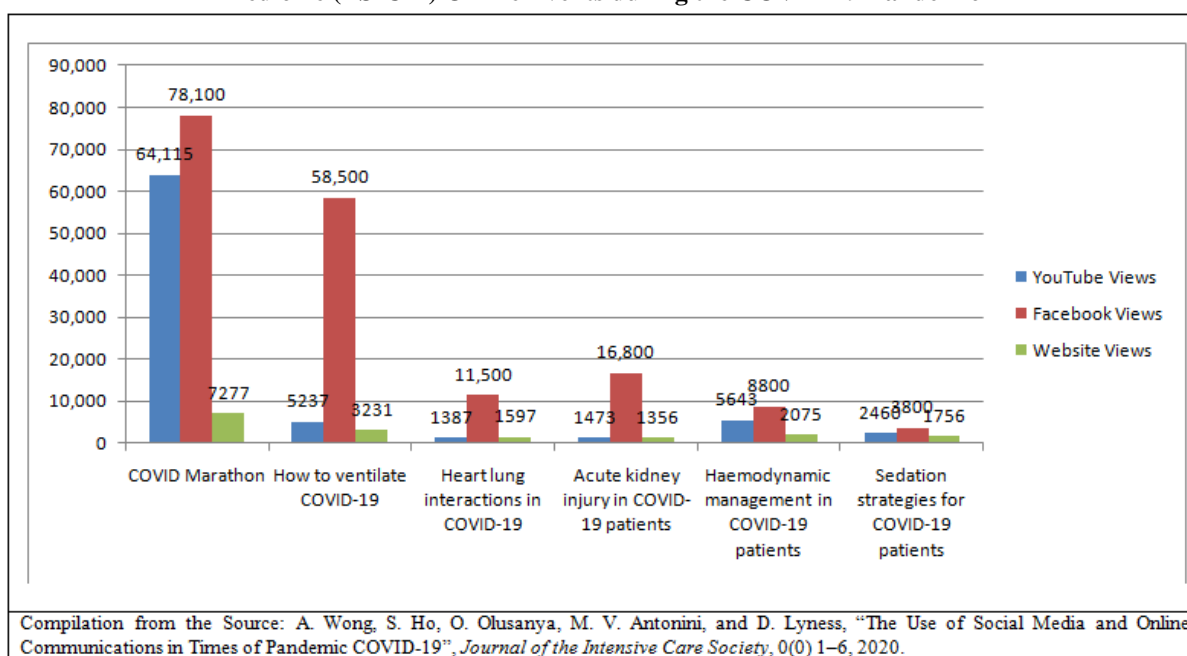


Figure 2
Number of YouTube, Facebook, and Website Viewers Recorded for European Society of Intensive Care Medicine (ESICM) Online Events during the COVID-19 Pandemic



WeChat is another commonly used online platform in China that not only allows sharing of information, images, videos, audios, emojis and stickers but also offers additional functional usage like online shopping, flight, bus, train bookings, games and entertainment. The research study had shown that WeChat interactions had helped in online self-disclosure, quality of friendship and psychological wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Amosun, T. S., et al., 2021)

Sina Weibo had established itself as another major social media platform in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. It had allowed individuals, business organizations and government departments to share information and emotional support during the crisis period. Further, Sina Weibo had proved to be helpful to disseminate

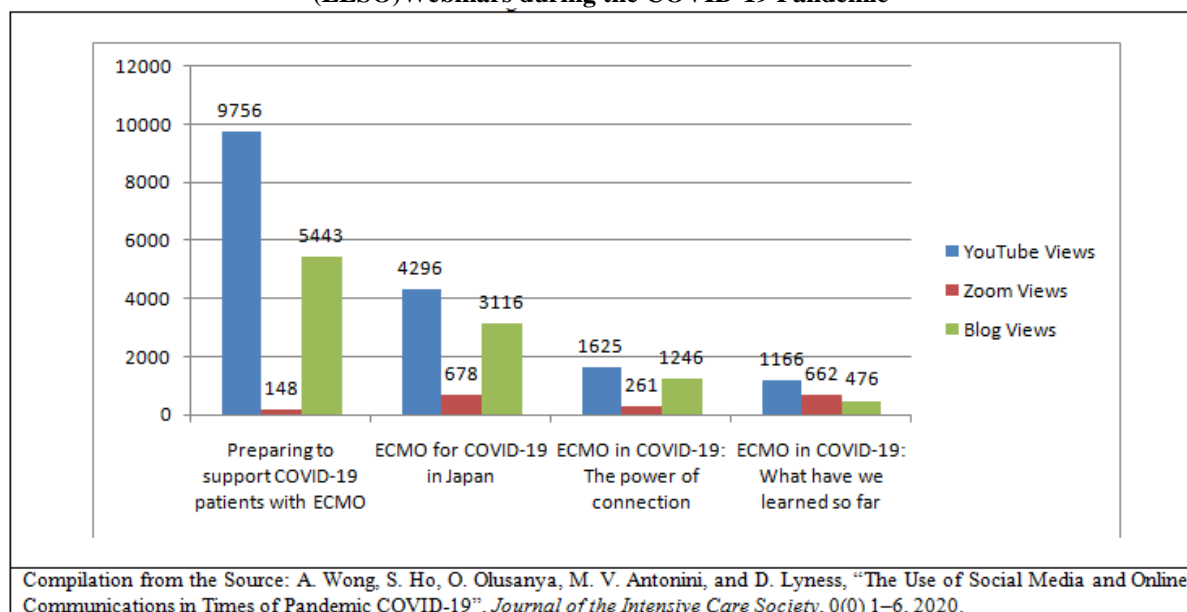
information about prevention of pandemic, framing policies and guidelines to support people during the pandemic. (Wang, J., et al., 2020)

Apart from that, smooth flow of communication at the time of crisis had become the need of the hour during the phase of lockdown to ensure that the essential services did not come to a standstill. Some popular online conferencing platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google’s video conferencing app Meet, Skype, etc. had also become very popular among users particularly in the business fraternity.

Microsoft Teams is another online chat based business communication platform that allows sharing of documents, online meetings, storage of files, video conferencing, screen sharing etc. It is a platform that allows huge team space using shared workspace software and can accommodate large number of members located in various parts of the world. Microsoft Teams has unique features like Teams and channels, SharePoint online, Online meetings, Audio conferencing and Full telephony. All important documents, files, presentations shared during conversations get automatically stored in a site in SharePoint online. Online meetings can be scheduled beforehand using in built calendar in the application and the members of the team get instant notification about the meeting timings and other details. Meetings can be recorded and used as reference for future use. Chat messages can also be exchanged while the meeting is in progress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Microsoft Teams had established its importance in business communication globally. (What is Microsoft Teams and who should be using it?)

Zoom is a video conferencing app, which is meant particularly for business usage. After commencing its commercial journey in January 2013, Zoom was gradually gaining popularity worldwide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom’s usage had tremendously increased globally. Both personally as well as professionally, people started using Zoom while being confined to their homes during lockdown. In this connection, Zoom’s valuation had surpassed \$100 billion during the pandemic, approximately 383% rise on its value in January 2020. (Iqbal, M., 2021) Besides that, the Extracorporeal Life Support Organization (ELSO), a non profit organization that established in 1989 and supporting health care professionals and scientists who are associated with extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, had highlighted the number of Zoom views for ELSO webinars during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Figure 3). (Wong, A., et al. 2020)

Figure 3
Number of YouTube, Zoom, and Blog Viewers Recorded for Extracorporeal Life Support Organization (ELSO) Webinars during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Google’s video conferencing app Meet can hold 250 people in an online meeting, depending upon the ‘Workspace subscription’. Meet was particularly designed with commercial requirements in mind as an easy-to-use online interface. The video, screen sharing activities, audio, etc. are automatically saved to Google Drive. If the video meeting is scheduled through Google Calendar, then the recording can be accessed by the Calendar. Globally, most number of educational institutions comprising of schools, colleges, universities, tutorials, etc. had significantly depended on Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet and additional resources like Google classroom and hangout for conducting online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. (COVID impact on meeting apps: Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams never had it better)

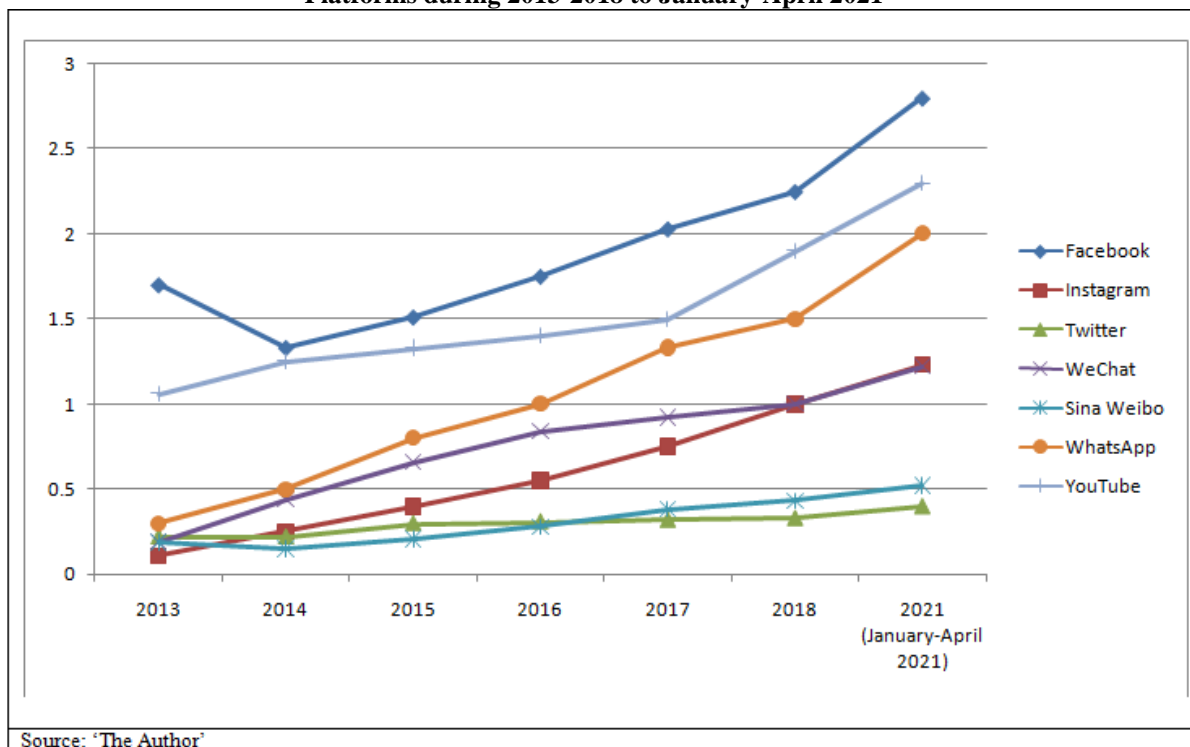
In this context, it can be observed that advancement in technology has made business communication simpler even in the hard times like the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, messaging, emails and video conferencing have particularly made communication simpler, much more improved and faster than ever before. Hence, by using more online communication modes prove to be advantageous for the business organizations in maintaining a professional work culture during the pandemic. The online communication has reduced the need of a physical workplace, thereby abiding by the social distancing norm and simultaneously, the employees have the option of working from home during the lockdown phase. The availability of high speed internet services have made the working days much more fruitful without being in office. Even important documents can be signed and sent to any part of the world without losing much time. Interviews are now being conducted online without the need of being physically present. Trainings can be imparted online giving the scope to trainees to complete it at their convenient time. Therefore, the shift from offline to online modes of communication has proved to be a welcome move across the business organizations globally during the pandemic in 2019-20. (Susanto, H., et al., 2021)

IV.III. TREND AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION USAGE DURING PRE AND POST COVID-19

With this backdrop, in this research study, a trend analysis and a comparative analysis of online communication usage during pre and post COVID-19 time period has been carried out. The main objectives behind performing such analyses are to assess trend and comparative analyses of online communication usage between 2013 to January-April 2021.

After obtaining the available requisite secondary data, a trend analysis has been carried out based on number of people using some popular online mode of communication platforms globally during 2013-2018, i.e. in pre COVID-19 period to January-April 2021, i.e. during post COVID-19 time. In this study, seven well-liked online social media platforms, namely, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WeChat, Sina Weibo, WhatsApp and YouTube have been selected to analyze the global usage trend. (Figure 4). The vertical axis and horizontal axis of the figure are represented as number of global users in billions and time period respectively. After performing the trend analysis, it is found that all seven social media platform usages across the globe had registered an upward trend growth during both pre and post COVID-19 time period. Consequently, it validates that the usage of online communication mode has increased worldwide over the recent time period, justifying its growing importance in the modern world.

Figure 4
Trend Analysis of Global Online Mode of Communication Usage (in Billions) in Seven Social Media Platforms during 2013-2018 to January-April 2021



Besides that, a comparative analysis has been performed between these seven online communication platforms global usage in 2018, i.e., just the previous year of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and January-April 2021, i.e., post COVID-19 period. (Figure 5). After carrying out the analysis, it is found that the global usage of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WeChat, Sina Weibo, WhatsApp and YouTube had increased from 2.25 to 2.8 billion, 1 to 1.23 billion, 0.33 to 0.4 billion, 1 to 1.22 billion, 0.43 to 0.52 billion, 1.5 to 2 billion, and 1.9 to 2.3 billion respectively during 2018 to January-April 2021. In tune with the fact, the percentage growth of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WeChat, Sina Weibo, WhatsApp and YouTube had recorded around 24 percent, 23 percent, 21 percent, 22 percent, 21 percent, 33 percent, and 21 percent respectively during 2018 to January-April 2021. (Figure 6). Subsequently, it signifies that the global usage of WhatsApp has been recorded highest among all other social media platforms during the peak time period of COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 5
Comparative Analysis of Global Online Mode of Communication Usage (in Billions) in Seven Social Media Platforms between 2018 and January-April 2021

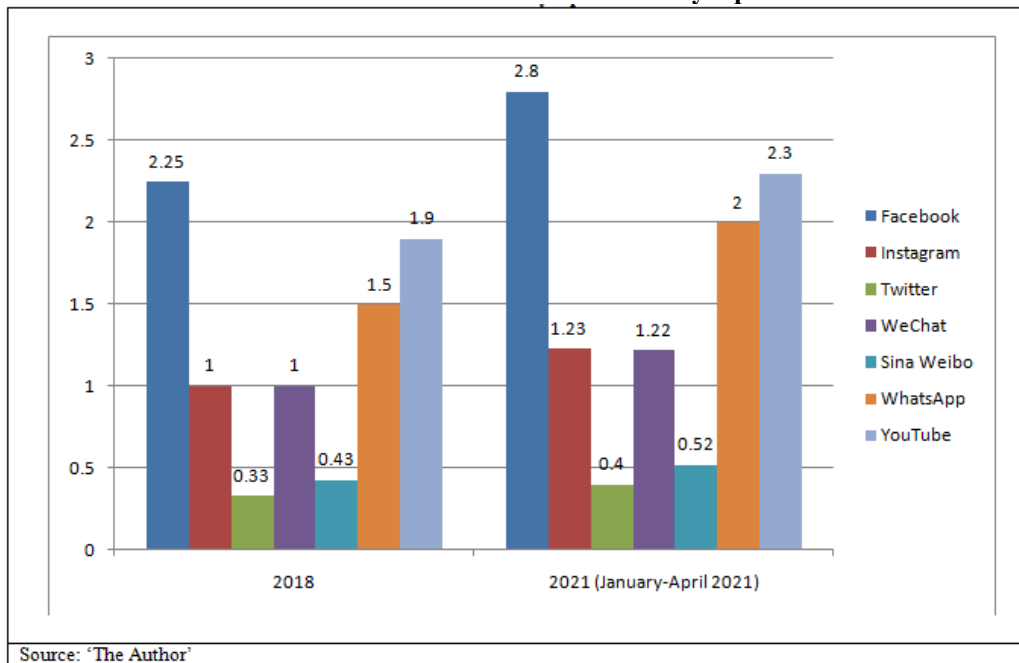
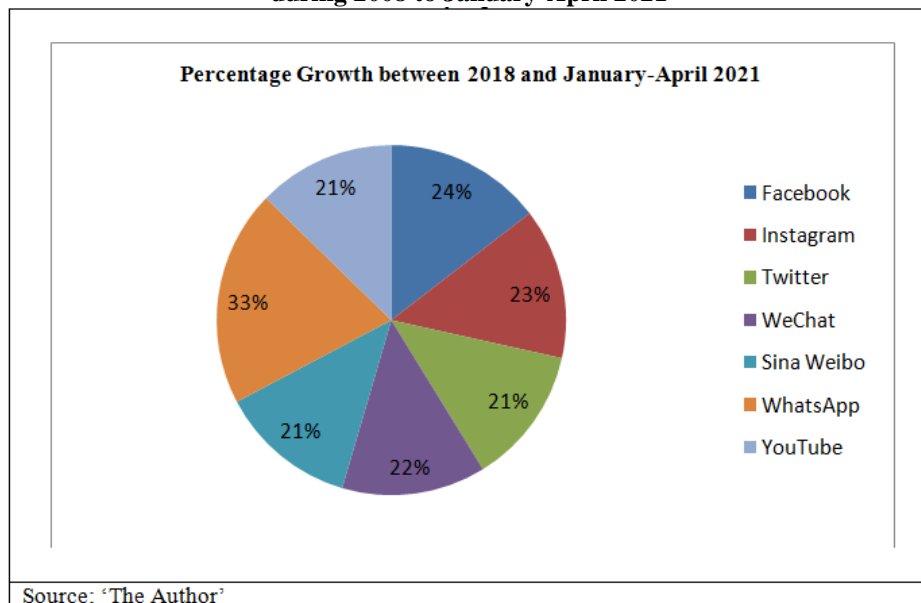


Figure 6
Percentage Growth of Global Online Mode of Communication Usage in Seven Social Media Platforms during 2018 to January-April 2021



IV.IV. BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS' ONLINE COMMUNICATION BASED LEARNING APPROACH FOR RE-SKILLING THEIR EMPLOYEES DURING POST PANDEMIC

Prior to outbreak the COVID-19 pandemic, several business organizations in the world had seemingly distrusted their own technological capacities and simultaneously, doubted the skills of their respective workforces. During the pandemic, gradually, the business organizations across the globe has made significant changes in their strategies, pushing more emphasize on the online medium to re-skilling the workforces. In this context, business executives has expected the commercial competitiveness and workforce resilience as two major advantages they mostly have aimed to achieve from the online transformation post pandemic situation. (COVID-19 and the future of business)

In tune with the fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has enhanced the adoption of online communication approaches to re-create the best of in-person learning scope mainly by live video conferencing and other social media platforms sharing. The offline to online communication modes transformation has actually made it possible to scale up learning efforts in a more cost-effective manner and simultaneously, permits larger personalization for learners with greater efficiency. (Agarwal, S., et al., 2020).

Moreover, the pandemic has compelled the global business fraternity to increase its usage of online communication mode particularly to support minimizing the unnecessary physical interactions between employees. Consequently, this strategic shift towards more online communication mode usage has actually meant to find ways for reinventing the overall work culture in the business organization. (Agarwal, S., et al., 2020).

V. CONCLUSION

Online communication provides a new dimension to businesses during the pre and post COVID-19 era by providing immense opportunities to interact internally and externally within an organization. Online and social media platforms have become a powerful tool for social interaction. There are definite benefits to the usage of online platforms in times of pandemic where time constraints, physical distancing and the need to distribute correct information have forced users to find alternate ways of re-skilling, learning, working and accordingly adopting several new norms. Digital communication is a reality of the hour and it is going to dominate the sphere of communication in years to come.

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