

The Battle Between Click And Brick Universities

The role of contemporary universities is currently experiencing tremendous change due to the advancements in technology. Today, it is not just a matter of sound administrative decisions made by institutions, but rather a global realization that e-learning is a dynamically growing industry. Undergraduate and graduate students demand their universities to provide them with the latest technological tools available, so as to increase their efficiency ratios, elevate the quality of their studies, and acquire the needed business skills, which will later help them find the job of their dreams. For-profit or non-profit universities, among other things, produce professionals and need to serve their academic "customers" what they desire if they mean to stay in business. But, are all postsecondary institutions supposed to offer their curriculums through e-learning and what is the outcome of these technological "services" for the academic community?

According to different scholars, as the industrial economy gave its place to what is known today as the "knowledge economy," the academic world was bound to be impacted. A number of alterations in the university's form, the consistency of its faculty, the demographics of its participants, the financial resources available, along with the political and social changes that have emerged, caused higher educational institutions to reconstruct their model and redesign their identity. Continuing incorporating these changes and fostering technological innovations has become a major challenge for academic institutions; who wish to keep up with the global pace, or even lead the future course of action. Internet usage and what has come to be known as the educational model of e-learning have created the grounds upon which various stakeholders argue in favor or against the proliferation of a vast variety of technology-based educational tools.

The primary role of a university is to act as an agent towards discovering, creating, preserving, disseminating, and applying knowledge. The act of accepting or rejecting substantial technological tools as educational breakthroughs, creates an opportunity for contemporary academic institutions to realize the importance of their present role and increase the outcome of their future influence on society. But, not all universities are ready to take this step towards modernization, nor should they try. Actually, the decision depends on different parameters, like the institution's "brand name", the magnitude and timing of the suggested adaptation, the skepticism of the academic environment, the cultural norms embedded in its system, and the acceptance ratio of the society within the institution operates.

E-learning has created two divisions in the academic field that are possible to be united to one great new force. 'Brick' and 'click' universities, distinguished by the physical location of their classes, residential or virtual respectively, target the same audience and thus come in opposition. Close observation and qualitative studies have indicated that there is a positive possibility which emerges in-between these two forms of contemporary education. The suggested brick-and-click academic form resembles that of a joint-venture and constitutes a very interesting and rather complete new model that has great future potential in this information age. Under this notion, click and brick universities are not in fact enemies. They are comrades in the vast battlefield of knowledge and they have to remain interrelated in order to increase their performance ratios, ensure higher quality standards for those enrolled, apart from increasing their profit ratios.

The potential benefits from e-learning become clearer, when one considers the global nature of the network constructed through the use of the Internet, the increased number of students in every virtual classroom, the availability of online resources and the ability of business oriented students to enroll. What is probably jeopardized is power and control, in comparison to the traditional model, as the old classic relationship between a professor and a student is transformed, since e-learning lacks personal contact and face-to-face interaction. Nevertheless, as long as the adequate budget and the necessary technological resources are available, administration and faculty members have the ability to use technology and its manifestations towards the improvement of this recently introduced educational tool, while eliminating drawbacks and taking full advantage of the opportunities these new e-learning techniques offer to all.

Although the e-learning educational model has to surpass the threat of creating a rivalry between elite and mass education students, the brick versus click universities battle has to end and these educational forms need to become allies. Constructing a new physical and cyber space community, where people exchange ideas, interact via a variety of tools, learn about different cultures, increase their overall knowledge base, enhance their capabilities, and most importantly learn how to think critically while judging their role during this process, is the primary responsibility of contemporary universities; whether existing online or in a physical space. The conclusion supported is that there should be no battle. Such arguments and debates stall educational exchange and are major setbacks, sacrificing the sacred mission of a university to create and promote knowledge.

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