"Switching to SIDE Mode"- COVID-19 and the Adaptation of Computer Mediated Communication Learning in Kenya

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ABSTRACT: The global onset of the novel Coronavirus in December 2019, and rising infections early 2020 forced institutions of higher education to quickly shift to virtual learning. In Kenya, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) - a real time interaction of humans through computer devices became a quick and necessary mode to facilitate continuous learning. CMC replaced face-to-face classroom interactions, exhibiting challenges and creative opportunities. Through qualitative research methods, I draw teaching and learning experiences of CMC from two private Kenyan Universities (Daystar and St. Paul's). This paper argues that the social identity model of de-individuation or SIDE mode (Spears and Reicher 1995), enhances effective computer mediated interactions. Findings show that in COVID-19 scenarios, tutors were forced to deal with an emotionally charged group of online students. Some students lacked stable Internet, or their parents were struggling financially and unable to sustain the technological needs. There were students who experienced stress related anxieties. These psycho-social contexts provide a plausible scenario to probe the social identity model of de-individuation effects (SIDE mode). The model is widely used in social-psychology to explain apparent breakdown of normative behavior among groups. In this case, the COVID-19 scenario pushed learners and tutors to adapt and deal with effects of CMC, at the same time manage learning anxieties. In this paper, I argue that in using CMC, tutors adapt less formal approaches that include adjusting to informal non-structured communication.

KEYWORDS: Computer Mediated Communication, COVID-19 Learning Adaptations, SIDE Mode

Introduction

Institutions of higher learning had never imagined a moment in time when all classroom interactions would be shifted online. While most Universities in Kenya offer Distance Learning (DL), this was on a smaller scale. Face-to-face classroom situations presented rich interpersonal conversations on a formal level. In these interactions, tutors and learners do not only focus on completing syllabuses, but stimulate diverse communicative experiences. This include:practical demonstrations, as well as building trust and confidence between learners and tutors. The tutors are able to interpret attitudes and feelings of learners and therefore, find working solutions occurring in day-to-day learning contexts. Through these interactions, academic institutions find effective ways of re-modelling their courses and addressing individual learner needs. At the onset of COVID-19 and limited access to physical classrooms, some Universities in Kenya quickly adapted new media technologies. They made transitions from face-to-face interactions to virtual learning. Though this paper does not focus on experiences in public Universities, existing differences in resource mobilization in private and public Universities plied possibilities of successful and sustainable online experience. Drawing from interviews with CMC users, personal experiences and observation techniques, some of CMC formats utilized included: WhatsApp audio and text messaging, audio/video sharing, zoom conferencing and e-learning platforms. Daystar and Saint Paul's Universities were chosen because of their proximity and quick online transitions. The institutions used tailored CMC formats, as well as University e-learning platforms and private communication providers like Kenya Education Network (Kenet). The variety of formats sustained online real-time classrooms interactions that conform to the CMC and SIDE mode models. These forms of interactions follow Stewart & Mann (2003) suggestions that Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) represent new forms of interactions, where users engage online, share information and gather data that can be used to interpret and analyse viable formats, without having to meet face-to-face. This paper adapts a similar approach in qualitative data collection and analysis.

Seale (2004, 421) has indicated that in face-to-face interpersonal interactions, users tend to hold back or withdraw from situations and discussions for fear of prejudice. Through participant observations, it was evident that experiences from face-to-face interactions and (CMC), learners online seemed eager and more forthright with their responses compared to face-to-face-interactions. Whereas classroom situations follow particular formal structures, there is a possibility to interrogate and provoke discussions that benefit from body language, human presence, humour and demonstrations that are valuable to learners taking practical courses.

For this study, analysis from St. Paul's and Daystar Universities act as barometers of how private Universities in Kenya transitioned to CMC. I was engaged in teaching media courses in these institutions, before the COVID-19 lockdown measures and during lockdown. The institutions have a huge focus on media and communications studies. The courses are modeled on classroom instructions, physical library resources, Film, Radio and Television studio practicals and industrial attachments to review student progress. With COVID-19, learning was confined online, tutors went through crash courses, and were expected to induct learners in the adaptation process. This paper argues that the social identity model of de-individuation or SIDE mode (Spears and Reicher 1995), gives a window through which we can interrogate and re-learn existing assumptions on the use of CMC. At the same time, find effective methods to utilize computer mediated interactions. In COVID-19 related psycho-social challenges provide a plausible scenario to probe the social identity model of de-individuation effects (SIDE model). The model is widely used in social-psychology to explain the apparent breakdown of normative behavior among groups. In this case, COVID-19 pushed learners and tutors to adapt and deal with effects of CMC. Interpreting the learning process through SIDE mode, we see that tutors employed less formal approaches to include informal non-structured communication.

Literature Review

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) enables the utilization of a number of technological applications that give the user ability to connect with other users virtually, without the need for physical interactions. The possibilities presented in the use and application of CMC relate to the utilization of concepts such as: Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (UGC). It is only in 2004 that the term Web 2.0 gained prominence to mean an innovative way to high technology enthusiasts to utilize the World Wide Web. The platform enables users to interact and network, enriched with content created across wider virtual frameworks (Murugesan 2017). In the preceding year, in 2005 adopters and inventors would also highlight the usefulness of User Generated Content. This approach changed the way people perceived virtual communication, particularly in the utilization of social media. The approach on its own, challenged the predominant media perception of agenda setting and influence. Previously, Walter Lipmann (1922) had argued that the media had the power to influence audience perceptions (Mccombs 2011). UGC provided a space where internet users became active and opinionated partakers of media content (Mccombs 2011). Users became more engaged and talked back through feedback (Obar & Wildmann 2015). Albeit, frequently in CMC contexts. I argue, this juncture is an early foundation into the manipulation and adaptation of computer interactions to serve communicative, as well as social goals.

This also provides a phase in media research that focused on effective online interactions. In their definition, Boyd and Ellison (2007), see these interactive media as the coming together of technological know-how, and sharing of media formats including video, audio, texting and messaging. In the observation of CMC contexts in Universities, learners and users maximized the creative use of social media, particularly WhatsApp. For example, the production of short smartphone videos and audios for practical class assignments. In the absence of CMC, the ability of learners to creatively apply these concepts for digital production would have been incomplete. Given, University media production studios were closed in the COVID-lockdown. In this scenario, users became actively involved in creating content, which was posted on blogs, shared via WhatsApp as a practical learning process in the digital space. As a result, CMC becomes a

space for self and public expression. Such skills prepare learners for the digital market, for private, business, information and education contexts.

Side Mode

The model deals with the self-idealization that comes in the context of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). Theorists (Lea & Spears 1992) argue that the social identity model of de-individuation model or SIDE mode describes how CMC users re-adjust messages when communicating under conditions where they are not seen. The communicative cues that emerge from SIDE mode contexts indicate that senders and receivers of messages share some familiarity. This means they can manipulate messages into easily adaptable cues. In this paper, framing content in precise forms eliminates the role-distance that may exist between the tutor and learner. Experiences from online/e-learning approaches during the COVID-19 situation in Kenya show that in SIDE mode contexts, tutors resorted to use WhatsApp, audio and text to keep-up interactive alternatives that provided visual anonymity. The model further suggests that CMC partners heightened familiarity was attained from existing relationships. The attachment further enhanced group identity rather than emphasizing on individuality of users. On the other hand, Spears & Postmes (1995) present different point of views from general assumptions on SIDE mode, they argue visual anonymity enables the immersion of a group leading to loss of self-hood and hence, of control over behaviour.

The researchers aver, such models depend on individual concepts of self. In essence, lack of a clear definition of self, in visual or physical contexts may not contribute to the actualization of the interaction, which will inhibit self-expression. In this case, the researchers have argued that conception of the self, is a unitary construct which makes individuals unique. They assert self can be recognized in generalized categories, as well as individualization categories. Hence, a social identity model of de-individuation (SIDE mode). Their argument points to the fact that SIDE mode gives group members a chance for full expression of their collective destinies. On the precincts of CMC, is the assumption that when receiving messages, an individual may tend to exaggerate perceptions of the message sender. The downside of CMC is that in the absence of face-to-face communication and non-verbal cues, receivers of messages may respond to form an impression, rather than giving full representation of contexts. This is a signifier of idealization which researchers relate to favourable initial cues. Research has indicated interest in adaptions of CMC as a facet in the interpretation and adaptations of social meanings. They see the interactive language in CMC, such as emojis, chat e.t.c that would otherwise be expressed through verbal cues. In this sense, Walther, Loh, and Granka (2005) looked at the critical position presented in the approach to face-to-face or via real-time computer chat. It was found that a number of verbal cues applied influenced the relationship of the communication interlock, comparatively to instances of non-verbal-communication in similar contexts

Computer Mediated Communication

Walther (2005) identifies (CMC) systems as those technologically generated variations of communication that are at the centre of our human interactions. I could also argue, they continuously displace rich human communication with machine interfaces. These variations have come to determine how humans interact on a daily basis. Walther further points out that CMC modes are integral to human initiation and development of interpersonal relationships. For instance, it is easy for people to get acquainted on online platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp and continue to forge relationships sustained through these CMC modes. In this study, as we shall discuss in the findings from interviews with online/e-learning users, the possibility of using CMC quickly advanced alternative solutions to communication barriers. The barriers related to physical distance that override social isolation, an essential precautionary measure to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus. The CMC changes significantly the structure and format in which messaging take place. CMC replaced the need for face-to-face interactions, with carefully constructed online messages with characteristic such as; brevity, concise instructions, and users

involvement. However, findings for this study indicate that some users preferred face-to-face interactions, as CMC limited lively classroom discussions. For instance, in a setting where tutors engage learners in group discussions, users found online groups and workshops rigid and artificial. It came short of creating rich discourses with humour, emphasis, personal mannerism and abilities in oratory debates.

As Donath (1999) has provided, text-based online discussions dominate conventional signals. She argues, such discussions are only composed of verbal statements. To illustrate, discussants can portray wrong impressions in online situations. It is not easy to tell whether experiences and observations presented online are a true reflection of realities. On the contrary, face-to-face interactions provide non-verbal cues like body language, facial expression and phonetic lapses which emphasize intended and perceived meanings. In CMC, personal relations that would be forged through face-to-face group discussions are also reduced. In this study, online learning interrupted existing group dynamics and introduced possibilities for creative interactions utilizing available CMC tools and systems. Literature further specifies various methodological approaches in the study of CMC systems. For instance, large-scale, detailed surveys that explain how users engage online (Katz & Rice 2002). Secondly, in the interpretation of CMC application, the focus is placed on metaphors that define the online experience for Internet data seekers (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs 2010). Thirdly, (Boyd 2007) looked at interpretive investigations from insights of interacting with groups of young people on their version of what being online means. In this paper, I use a similar approach to interpret nuances and meanings gathered from experiences of CMC users from University environments. Specifically, their transition from classroom interactions to online/e-learning.Comparatively,William and Christie's (1976) social presence theory, that emerged out of observations from Television research (iSALT Team 2014), adequately answers gaps within CMC. They contested differed capacities in various communications in the transmission of aspects of non-verbal cues in addition to verbal content. I argue that in switching to side mode, institutions of higher learning in Kenya, applied various forms of CMC. The choice was on viability and accessibility. The following table represents some forms of CMC adopted in higher institutions of learning, but prominent in Saint Paul's and Daystar University contexts, during COVID-19 lockdown.

Table 1. Forms of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

CMC Format	Description
Kenya Education Network (Kenet)	A web and video conference platform where users can initiate or join meetings. There is a possibility to create meeting rooms, or classrooms, share resources and interact through video/audio recording and messaging.
Zoom	A software platform used for video conferencing, hosting Webinar. Its interactive features including, voice and audio interfaces, texting, sharing resources, recording.
Google Meet	A video communication software developed in Google to replace Google hangouts.
Big Blue Button	A free software application for web conferencing systems, interfaced in university e-learning portals
Microsoft	It has capacity for visual studio has practical application for interactive possibilities.
E-Learning Modules	In a University set up, an e-learning module incorporates both instructions and assessment tools that include video clips, direct instruction, gaming elements and social media.
WhatsApp	A Facebook application that allows sending of messages through texting, audio recording, video calls, sharing images and interfacing with other social media platforms.

Definitions Sourced Online (2020).

Methods and Material: Textual Analysis

In this paper, I adapt a discourse analysis of texts. In reference, texts are written and spoken words in a social context (Fairclough 2013). Following adequate observations of experiences of online/e-learning contexts in two Universities (Daystar and Saint Paul's), I carried out focused interviews with learners and tutors. The interview respondents are treated as one unit of analysis because of their mirrored experiences and contexts. I employed CMC textual formats, as Mann and Stewart (2003) have argued, this mode of communication can also be used in social research. The interviews utilize CMC tools, specifically WhatsApp. I asked participants to record (audio) or text their views and experiences of online/e-learning, during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Further, participants were required to compare CMC interactions to face-to-face physical classroom learning scenarios. The participants shared personal experiences of abrupt shifts to online/e-learning from the onset of lockdown measures after, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Kenya on 16th March 2020. I transcribed recorded responses and matched with those in texts, to code according to relevant themes. The codes are then interpreted as a apart of textual analysis that deals with meaning-making in each social context.

Discourse in texts is exposed from talking about a topic (*experiences of online/e-learning, comparatively to face-to-face interactions*). Textual analysis has been used in several contexts including: an inter-connection between the media, texts, and audience. It has been widely adopted in researches on media, communication, cultural studies, socio-legal studies, education, history and politics (Seale 2004). However, there is no standard rule on doing discourse, the domains remain in contextual practice. For example, discursive psychology, media discourse, social discursive situations e.t.c. In this paper, textual analysis takes a micro-level analysis (deriving meanings in texts, analyzing nuances on a particular topic).

This paper learns from other discursive forms such as Norman Fairclough's (2013) situation of discourse analysis as a research investigation based on selected textual material. In his approach, language is seen as a social aspect and discourse does not only involve analyzing texts, nor just examining processes, but also studying relationships between texts, processes, and their social conditions. In this paper, the socio-cognitive situations in the application of the SIDE mode model of de-individuation in CMC. In essence, the expression of self in the discussed contexts illuminates on user perceptions on non-visual contexts of learning. I am cognizant that users may have self-deflected or idealized interpretations in the conceptualization of the SIDE mode model.

Table 2. Steps to Textual Selection

Steps	Selection Strategy
Step 1	Look at sentences and phrases participants use in making meaning out of online/e-learning and interactive differences to face-to-face.
Step 2	Analyse nuances that address participants in specific situational social contexts and within the framework of computer mediated communication and SIDE Mode.
Step 3	Look at the method of discourse production (audio texting vs worded texts) and how texts are creatively constructed to make arguments. Note, the number of paragraphs, the length of sentences, the style of phrases, vocabulary and illustrations e.g. pictures, graphics, emojis, intonation.
Step 4	Compare text nuances on online/e-learning and face-to-face interactions.

Adapted from (Radoli 2019, 98).

Textual Analysis

In this paper, empirical data is drawn from the analysis of textual material derived from transcripts from audio interviews and text messages. The data was gathered using WhatsApp messaging and audio as an aspect of CMC. In this section, I present meanings articulated through interviews and generate nuances and perceptions derived from five themes: *CMC formats in use, learning resources and E-library, access to internet and affordability, SIDE mode interactions and finally, I make comparisons to face-to-face interactions.* The coded themes were arrived at following steps outlined in (Table 2 above). From the point of CMC learning and SIDE mode perceptions, the textual analysis expose meanings within these coded themes that occur from nuances of users interpretations of experiences of their transition from face-to-face to online/e-learning. The outcomes give a variety of significant interpretations of discourses on challenges and gains of CMC during the COVID-19 lockdown period in Kenya. Further, findings are indicators of learning solutions against disruptions to physical classes in the academic calender. In addition to a logical sequence recognizing established themes in the steps of textual analysis (Table 2 above). The steps are practical in retrieving nuances and meanings from texts. I treat responses from the interviews with Saint Pauls's and Daystar University CMC users as one data set, and apply aspects of *texts* as my *unit of analysis* and interviews as my *research strategy*. I draw on the work of Norman Fairclough (2004) to expose five coded themes of analysis as highlighted above. I am interested in how these themes provide frames of interpretation of experiences and observations of CMC and SIDE Mode aspects of learning in COVID-19. The selection of themes as theorized in Fairclough (2004), stress on interpretative aspects of texts as established earlier. I look at the production of texts from interviews and how user's voices become alive in texts. The interviews process portrays a specific methodological strategy: *"letting the voices speak",* relating to aspects of media interviews (Radoli 2019, 99). Table 3 below summarizes interpretation of themes using both positive and negative nuances.

Table 3. Users Experiences of CMC & SIDE mode COVID-19 Lockdown

Coded Themes	**Negative Nuances**	**Positive Nuances**
CMC Formats in Use	- Outside and technical interruptions - Transition was not smooth, but adaptable overtime - Impracticable for technical classes, video, Radio, Film, Photography production - Poor user experience - Fluctuations in the e-learning portals	-Easy and adaptable -Video-conferencing and audio features enhanced learning -A thrilling experience for enthusiasts of online/e-learning - The semester progressed despite Covid-19 lockdown
Learning Resources /E-Library	-Tutors need to summarize instructional material -Universities are charging the same fees as face-to-face classes which discouraged most students joining new semester in lockdown. Its is a rip off. - Learners are more accustomed to physical library - Limited borrowing of material	-Access of online resources from the comfort of home/offices, parks - Lecture notes/source material are distributed on many CMC platforms -Variant platforms to creative and produce learning content, power points, video, audio, live-stream
Access to Internet/Affordability	- Many learners could not afford sustainable Internet connectivity - Power outages, lack of back-up generators in private set-ups unlike University set-ups - Lack of University support with Internet connectivity and costs - Learners in remote locations were disadvantaged	- Learners with stable Internet engaged smoothly - Tutors adapted quickly to transition - CMC platforms are futures for University online learning and accessibility - Universities devised modalities to develop course guidelines and training for CMC learning experiences
SIDE MODE/Interactions	- Laxity and informal approach to learning situations - Learning becomes a formality, learners can switch on and off at will Ghost learners on zoom video conference, with possibility to switch off video - Psychological and emotional appeal could manipulate to influence users	- Reserved learners opened up online and participated, through direct questions to tutors, messaging and audio - Conversations can be picked up later, I.e on WhatsApp - Creative ways of teaching and appealing to learners, emojis, anecdotes, chats, videos

Comparison to Face-to-Face interactions	- No closer interactions with tutors in CMC - Working students find balancing online learning and work a challenge - With e-learning concentration is hard to achieve and there are a lot of distractions. - Learners undergoing any other difficulties e.g. they are tired, they can't concentrate, they are facing human challenges of any nature e.t.c, are not adequately addressed. - Online/e-learning is artificial.	- Faster learning and understanding in CMC - Ease in attending classes accessed from work, home or whichever destination that one is in. - In face-to-face learning there is engagement and concentration. - CMC is a better alternative to complete lack of learning -Face-to- face brings out the aspect of social life, unlike online. - Face to Face is real

Source: Author (2020)

Discussion

From the qualitative data gathered from interviews with users of computer mediated communication in the two private University set-ups(Daystar and St. Paul's), it is evident that the transition from classroom interactions to online/e-learning scenarios was challenging in the beginning. Universities had not invested in the utilization of existing online portals, which were basically designed for faculty to process grades and interaction for students registration and monitoring progress. This had left most tutors less engaged online and dependent on classroom formats and pedagogical approaches. There was little or no training for tutors, for instance, Daystar and Saint Paul's Universities have both had an existing e-learning module, but a few members of the faculty utilized it before COVID-19.

"The transitions felt rushed and unprepared for. The weakest point was the lack of training for lecturers and students, the week prior to the closure. The faculty were not given clear guidelines on how to go about this. Luckily, I have used e-learning before and I was able to kick of my classes with ease. However, the system was quite frustrating because during class sessions we kept being bumped out the class sessions had to wait to re-connect" (Nellius Kareri, Tutor Daystar University 12th July 2020).

This view confirms the existence of a lethargic approach to teaching online before COVID-19. Emphasis on electronic learning was concentrated on the use of projectors and courses in ICT and media production. The Universities under study had distance learning programmes, but the design and approach were different from the intensity which online lectures demanded. Public Universities are not a focus for this study, and their experiences were not studied. However, in private Universities studied, it took up to three weeks after lockdown measures for the specified Universities to create separate websites or to update e-learning portals. On the other hand, public Universities which form a broader base for University education in Kenya, struggled to get online (Nganga, Waruru, Nakweya 7th May 2020). By the time of writing, a large number were still trying to find modalities to progress with the academic calender. Daystar and Saint Paul's Universities made the transition fairly swiftly, despite insufficient support to tutors and learners. For instance, in Daystar until the fourth week, some learners had not logged in for classes. At Saint Paul's, the University administration quickly allowed and guided lecturers through variant forums that worked for learners. This included: sending notes and lecture materials via emails, using WhatsApp platforms. In Daystar University, concentration was more on official e-learning platforms to enable monitoring of progress in early weeks of CMC transition. The University pegged some of strategies on the Commission of University Education (CUE) stipulations on quality academic curriculum. However, this was skewed, heralding a brisk move to set-up an an ICT and counselling task-force to address both technical and psychological questions.

For instance, the Daystar University Vice Chancellor employed CMC modes such as YouTube and Facebook updates to offer moral support to the University body (Daystar VC Address 2020). From interviews and observations, this paper found that the cost of Internet interfered with quality of learning, some learners could not sustain Internet bundle costs for participating on platforms like Zoom.

"The challenge has been the issue of power outage and bundles. In school WiFi is paid for and there is a back-up generator to deal with power problems. When doing classes from home, you are responsible for power and also responsible for WiFi. Just-in-case you have an issue with your WiFi provider then you are stuck there and cant do nothing. When power goes off at home and your gadget was not charged then you are in for a rude shock (Felix Maringa, Learner Daystar University, July 13th 2020).

There were other cost effective ways of utilizing the platform, like logging in without video. However, most learners reported that the cost factor limited a one-on-one engagement on Zoom. Tutors were left to deal with both technical and emotional challenges that learners had been suddenly submerged into. It called for acts of humanity, being sensitive and understanding to the needs of specific students. Tutors interviewed were aware that some learners were struggling and resorted to cheaper free formats, particularly, WhatsApp or Google Meet.

"I had a better experience with one class, Digital Journalism where the use of computers greatly enhanced our experiences. It was easier for students to share their videos, podcasts, and photo stories for the rest to critique. The class was very small, only 10 students, so we had frequent and sufficient interaction like we would have had in the face-to-face set up" (Anne Anjao, Adjunct Tutor, Daystar & Saint Paul's Universities).

While it was expected that the Universities would facilitate technological needs in the transition, it was observed the cost implication and financial uncertainties posed during the COVID-19 scenario, limited much of the support. Whilst most public Universities cut faculty pay by 40% (Kigotho 25th May 2020), private Universities progressed online through increasing faculty work-load and reducing the number of adjunct lecturers. In the Kenyan context, this meant that adjunct tutors lacked financial emoluments for long periods, including costs that would facilitate provision of Internet bundles, given a limited or barred access to University premises.

To cope and keep learners motivated, tutors devised ways to sustain classes and keep learners occupied. From experience gathered for this study, tutors who had no Internet access were forced to install home Internet despite financial constraints to keep up with the lectures. Of the two Universities surveyed, Saint Paul's was deemed least expensive since tutors were allowed to adapt cheap but functional CMC formats including: WhatsApp classes and and sharing notes on email.

Students from middle class family love the experience, but not all can afford the Internet costs. Those who have problems are struggling and need to have Internet bundles. When we re-open, we propose that we shall continue with virtual learning. In the beginning, it was difficult, but there have been quick adjustment and growing online numbers. CMC should go on forever. We should allow the blended mode of studies" (Dr. Faustin Chongombe, Head of Department St. Paul's University- July 13, 2020).

Comparatively, Daystar University approach to interactive and practical learning was found expensive, in terms of Internet costs for video-conferencing and graded group discussions. Despite challenges in transitioning to CMC and SIDE mode variations, tutors carried on the semester, from its mid-point at the time of the lockdown and towards expected physical opening proposed for September 2020 (Daily Nation July 3rd 2020). Learners interviewed observed that while, there were efforts to cope with COVID-19 related technical and emotional challenges CMC discussions were skewed, some students got away with limited participation.

"Face to face is real, online I find it artificial. It's although a better alternative as completely without. Face to face remain the best option because it includes also human interactions and it's real time in all aspects. Which means when the students are undergoing any other difficulties eg. they are tired, they can't concentrate, they are facing human challenges of any nature etc" (Andrew Kandia, Student Saint Pauls University, July 12 2020).

Learners who rushed with their families to the rural areas due to fear of rising COVID-19 infections were locked away following government measures and endured poor and costly Internet connectivity.

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to showcase experiences of the transition from face-to-face interactions to online/elearning (CMC) modes in two Universities in Kenya. These experiences may not be a representation of the scenario in all institutions of higher learning in Kenya, yet it serves as a mirror on efforts and gaps within switching to SIDE mode and the adaptation of CMC in situations of higher learning. For instance, it was observed that the University interactive discussion portals needed to be improved to address gaps that existed in higher education. Basing on the result, I conclude that institutions studied, made quick transitions within their capacities to create user effective CMC portals. The platforms adapted different CMC functions that made e-learning easier. However, adjustments are required to make user-friendly interface portals. For instance, in this study, Saint Paul's University, which had a near non-functional online portal, quickly adjusted and has since upgraded to full throttle CMC models. From the process, I conclude that despite earlier transitional challenges from face-to-face interactions, these Universities maintained high level examination integrity. There were new adaptations and experiments with open book examinations however, some learners preferred traditional examination approaches, in a formal spaced setups. Notwithstanding cost implications, most users preferred CMC approaches to e-learning. In this case, CMC is more practical and provide discussant facets important in developing independent learning, rather than traditional tutor centred methods. The interactions were not limited to learning process, but utilized other CMC formats. In sum, the approach to CMC and SIDE mode gives endless possibilities beyond COVID-19. Beyond COVID-19, learners must refrain from viewing tutors as custodian of knowledge, and become creators of knowledge. CMC and SIDE mode modalities in the COVID-19 experience, present a new paradigm shift, an opportunity to explore the Internet and enrich the learning experience.

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