



POST-PANDEMIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN STUDENT BEHAVIOUR IN HIGHER EDUCATION: DIGITAL CULTURE, INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS, AND EMERGING CLASSROOM CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted higher education systems worldwide and significantly reshaped the learning environments experienced by university students. As institutions transitioned from extended periods of remote learning back to face-to-face instruction, educators began reporting noticeable changes in student behaviour, academic engagement, and interpersonal relationships within classrooms. This study examines emerging behavioural patterns among college students in the post-pandemic period, focusing on attitudes toward academic responsibility, relationships with teachers and parents, and the broader influence of digital culture and social media.

Particular attention is given to how online communication environments influence student identity formation, peer recognition, and the expression of opinions within academic contexts. In certain circumstances, these dynamics may contribute to new forms of public criticism or discussion related to educators and institutional practices. Although such cases represent limited occurrences rather than characteristics of the entire student population, they highlight evolving dynamics in student–faculty relationships within digitally connected societies.

Using a mixed-method framework combining literature analysis, survey-based data, and qualitative faculty observations, this research explores how behavioural changes among students may be shaped by psychological adjustment after the pandemic, the normalization of digital communication, and changing expectations regarding institutional authority. Survey responses collected from undergraduate students and faculty members indicate patterns related to academic motivation, social media engagement, and classroom interaction. The findings suggest that while many students demonstrate resilience and adaptability in the post-pandemic academic environment, certain behavioural tendencies—including increased digital distraction and evolving communication norms—may influence classroom dynamics.

The study concludes that higher education institutions must adapt to these changing patterns through constructive communication channels, digital literacy initiatives, and policies that balance student participation with professional respect. Rather than viewing behavioural shifts as generational decline, the research interprets them as reflections of a rapidly transforming educational landscape shaped by technological, social, and global influences.

KEYWORDS: Post-Pandemic Education, Student Behaviour, Higher Education, Social Media Influence, Digital Culture, Academic Engagement

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MBA, Mcom, MEC,
DiMAP, DHRM

How to Cite:

Dr. Thomas P Mathew
(2026), Post-Pandemic
Transformations in
Student Behaviour
in Higher Education:
Digital Culture,
Institutional
Dynamics, and
Emerging Classroom
Challenges,
International
Educational Journal of
Science & Engineering
(IEJSE), Vol: 9, Issue: 3,
08-11

INTRODUCTION

The global spread of COVID-19 created one of the most significant disruptions in the history of modern education. Universities across the world were required to suspend traditional classroom instruction and rapidly adopt remote learning systems in order to ensure continuity of academic activities. Although digital technologies made it possible for institutions to maintain educational programs during this crisis, the transition also altered the social and behavioural dimensions of higher education in ways that continue to influence academic environments today.

For many students, the pandemic coincided with formative stages of academic development. Months of remote learning reshaped how students interacted with educational content, communicated with peers, and engaged with instructors. Digital platforms became the primary medium through which lectures were delivered, assignments were completed, and social interaction occurred. As universities gradually returned to in-person learning, educators began to observe noticeable changes in classroom engagement, communication styles, and expectations regarding teacher–student relationships.

These behavioural changes should not be interpreted simply as disciplinary concerns or generational attitudes. Instead, they reflect broader transformations in communication culture, digital interaction patterns, and psychological adjustment following a period of global disruption. Students returning to campus are navigating learning environments that combine traditional academic expectations with communication norms shaped by digital culture.

An important factor influencing these dynamics is the expanded role of social media in students' daily lives. During periods of lockdown, social networking platforms became central spaces where young adults exchanged opinions, formed identities, and maintained connections with peers. While these platforms provided valuable social support during a time of isolation, they also introduced communication styles characterized by immediacy, visibility, and public expression.

When these patterns intersect with academic settings, they may influence how students interpret

authority and institutional practices. In many instances, students demonstrate greater willingness to participate in discussions and express opinions regarding their educational experiences. Such participation can strengthen critical thinking and democratic engagement within universities. However, situations occasionally arise in which disagreements or dissatisfaction are discussed informally among peer networks or through digital platforms rather than through direct academic dialogue.

In several higher education contexts, faculty members have reported instances where classroom concerns or disagreements became topics of informal discussion among student groups. In some situations, educators who adopt flexible or student-centered teaching approaches may also become subjects of peer commentary or criticism. These situations do not necessarily reflect hostility toward educators but may be connected to broader social dynamics in which public expression of opinion attracts attention within peer communities.

It is therefore necessary to analyse post-pandemic student behaviour within the wider context of social transformation, digital communication practices, and the psychological effects of prolonged disruption. By examining these influences collectively, higher education institutions can better understand emerging behavioural patterns and develop strategies that support both student participation and professional academic relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research examining the educational effects of the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that the rapid transition to online learning significantly altered students' study habits and learning environments. Dhawan (2020) notes that remote learning required students to rely more heavily on independent study and digital communication tools, often reducing the structured interaction typically provided by classroom settings.

Psychological studies conducted during the pandemic also document increased stress, uncertainty, and social isolation among university students (Aristovnik et al., 2020). These experiences may continue to influence academic behaviour even

after the return to physical campuses. Students re-entering traditional classrooms must adjust not only to academic expectations but also to renewed forms of social interaction.

Digital culture has further reshaped how young adults communicate and interpret social experiences. Social media platforms frequently encourage immediate expression of opinions and public interaction with large peer networks. According to Twenge (2021), such environments can influence identity formation and perceptions of social recognition among younger generations.

Educational scholars emphasize that while modern universities increasingly support student participation and open dialogue, constructive communication frameworks remain essential. Biesta (2015) argues that democratic educational environments require mutual respect between students and educators in order to sustain productive learning relationships.

These perspectives suggest that behavioural changes observed in post-pandemic higher education should be interpreted within broader social and technological contexts rather than as isolated educational problems.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a mixed-method approach combining quantitative survey analysis with qualitative faculty observations. The objective was to identify patterns in student behaviour and interpret them within the broader context of post-pandemic educational environments.

A survey questionnaire was distributed to undergraduate students across several academic disciplines. The questionnaire included Likert-scale questions measuring academic motivation, classroom engagement, digital habits, and perceptions of teacher interaction. A total of 312 student responses were collected.

Additionally, 42 faculty members participated in semi-structured interviews designed to explore behavioural changes observed among students following the return to in-person instruction. Faculty participants were asked to describe patterns related to attention levels, participation, communication

styles, and classroom interactions.

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to examine survey responses, including frequency distribution and correlation analysis. Qualitative responses from faculty interviews were analysed to identify recurring themes related to classroom dynamics and communication patterns.

FINDINGS

Survey results indicate that social media usage remains highly integrated into students' daily routines. More than half of respondents reported spending over four hours per day on social networking platforms, suggesting that digital environments continue to shape communication habits and attention patterns among university students.

A comparison of self-reported academic motivation before and after the pandemic shows mixed results. While some students reported increased motivation associated with returning to campus environments, a larger proportion indicated that maintaining concentration and academic discipline remained challenging.

Faculty observations provide further insight into these dynamics. A majority of educators reported noticing shorter attention spans and increased digital distractions during classroom sessions. At the same time, several faculty members noted that students appear more willing to ask questions, express opinions, and participate in discussions compared with earlier cohorts.

An interesting pattern emerged in faculty interviews regarding classroom interactions. Some educators reported situations in which classroom disagreements or dissatisfaction were discussed widely among student peer groups. In certain cases, these discussions occurred within informal digital spaces rather than through institutional feedback channels.

A paradoxical observation reported by several faculty participants involved supportive educators occasionally becoming subjects of informal criticism within student circles. This dynamic may be linked to broader communication patterns in which

expressions of strong opinions attract peer attention within social networks. When discussions occur outside structured academic dialogue, they may unintentionally affect professional relationships within educational environments.

It is important to emphasize that these cases represent limited occurrences rather than widespread behaviour among students. Most students continue to demonstrate respect for educators and engage constructively with academic institutions. Nevertheless, the presence of such dynamics highlights the evolving nature of communication between students and faculty in digitally mediated environments.

The findings suggest that post-pandemic academic environments are characterized by a transitional phase in which traditional educational structures coexist with new forms of communication shaped by digital culture.

CONCLUSION

The behavioural transformations observed among university students following the COVID-19 pandemic reflect broader changes in communication culture, digital technology use, and social expectations. Students returning to physical campuses are navigating learning environments influenced by both traditional academic practices and digital communication norms developed during extended periods of remote interaction.

While challenges related to attention, digital distraction, and communication styles remain present, many students also demonstrate resilience and adaptability in adjusting to post-pandemic academic life. Increased student participation and willingness to express opinions may contribute positively to educational dialogue when supported by constructive communication frameworks.

Higher education institutions must therefore adapt to evolving student behaviour by strengthening systems that promote respectful dialogue and responsible digital engagement. Initiatives such as digital literacy programs, structured feedback channels, and open communication between students and educators can help maintain balanced academic environments.

Rather than viewing behavioural shifts as evidence of generational decline, universities should interpret them as indicators of a rapidly changing educational landscape. By recognizing the complex influences shaping contemporary student behaviour, institutions can develop strategies that support both academic excellence and collaborative learning communities.

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