



Routledge Research in Higher Education

EXPLORING INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS IN TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED HIGHER EDUCATION

Neelam Dwivedi



Exploring Institutional Logics in Technology-Mediated Higher Education

This book articulates the complexities inherent in higher education's multi-faceted response to the forces of mediatization—or how institutions change when their social communication gets mediated by technology—and introduces a novel perspective to comprehend them in a systematic way. By drawing on archival analysis and six organizational case studies, the author empirically traces the emergence of a cyber-cultural institution within higher education. As these case studies demonstrate, this new institutional logic requires creativity, individual recognition, and an underlying platform powered by cyber technologies and digitization of content. Using an analytical lens, this cyber-cultural perspective answers many questions about why faculty refuse to adopt online education, why students struggle with mediated teaching, and what possibly could be done to take online education to its next level.

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Exploring Institutional Logics in Technology-Mediated Higher Education

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Foreword

I am pleased and honored to write the foreword for this important book on technology-mediated changes coming to higher education. I first met the author, Dr. Neelam Dwivedi, in 2014 when she was a student in my qualitative research methods course. In her field study project for the course, she explored the effects of a new institution-wide administrative system in a large multi-campus university. Though it was *huge* in scope, I witnessed—through successive updates to our class—as she wrestled this complex topic into conceptual submission and produced an impressively coherent result. The next year I had another opportunity to witness her ability to address a large, complicated research problem in the field of higher education that balances theoretical insights and practical implications. I was invited to serve as a member of her dissertation committee. This time she was taking on a complex research problem on the academic side of higher education. She had decided to seek a theoretically coherent way to understand the impacts of technology mediation in higher education. It is that work that has resulted in this book. Through a combination of rigorous theoretical and field data analysis, Dr. Dwivedi has successfully captured the tensions that currently exist across the spectrum of higher education stakeholders. She characterizes this tension as resulting from a new cyber-cultural logic in higher education.

It is no exaggeration to say that there is, literally, a revolution underway in higher education. For thousands of years, the professor was the embodiment of the university: the focal point of knowledge—both its generation and its dissemination. But that is rapidly changing. As I read this book, I found myself continuously reflecting on my own career as a professor, which has been played out against the backdrop of the growth of technology-mediated education. When I was an undergraduate and graduate student in the 1970s, students still viewed the professor as the source of knowledge—and took notes in class. This was my image of higher education when I began my career in the 1980s. But very soon things began to change. And by the last year that I taught, 2017, half of my teaching assignments were conducted online. Over the past four

decades, technology has been turning higher education inside out—with no end in sight.

Accompanying the increasingly dominant role of information technology in higher education has come a fundamental change in the professor's role. The job of the professor had been to generate, manage, and disseminate to students knowledge about a particular discipline. And the administration of higher education was originally about developing and nurturing the best professors as the means of enabling the best education for university students. In this model, information content was managed indirectly. As such, higher education administration was about people; the hiring and management of professors subsumed the management of the knowledge with which professors engaged. In that regard, a professor was like a priest or therapist: the person and the disciplinary information were inextricably linked. But now higher education, thanks to technology, is being deconstructed. Just as the invention of the printing press led to the separation of knowledge from the author, the roles that had previously been enacted by a single professor are now being assigned to a myriad of different types of higher education professionals: content developer, course manager, and instructional designer, to name a few. Consequently, the "professor" of another era is now one of many actors in the business of higher education. Dr. Dwivedi has made analogies between the professor, on the one hand, and the poet or playwright, on the other, and between the professor and the actor who performs the plays or poems.

To say whether all of this is for better or worse is not the goal of this book. The transformation of higher education is well underway with strong forces fueling its progression. Enabling technology, a desire to lower the cost of education, private sector interest in economic opportunities, consumer expectations, and the democratization of higher education are all factors.

As is so often the case with times of significant change, it is very challenging to step back and comprehend just what is going on. *This* is the contribution of Dr. Dwivedi's book. She employs a rigorous research approach and innovative theoretical insights to provide the reader with an accessible way of understanding what we are currently experiencing. She does so by articulating the current status of higher education as caught in a series of "tensions." A multiplicity of institutional identities, conflicting teaching schemas, content stratification, and cyber-cultural identity emerge as the key themes characterizing this era.

When considering audiences for this book, I conclude that anyone connected to or interested in higher education would want to read this book. It should be required reading for individuals who are currently in or considering a professorial career so that they can better understand their profession. The treatment of teaching schemas brings to mind the contribution this book would make to college teacher training courses as

well as to those engaged in learning design. It will also enable university administrators to better understand the landscape they are navigating. In addition, those responsible for directing the future of higher education (both policy makers and investors influencing the not-for-profit and for-profit realms) would do well to read this book. As technology mediation moves to lower-level education, I see this book as valuable reading for those working in the K–12 domain as well. Technology professionals who are facilitating this revolution in higher education could benefit from understanding the impacts of their work on various stakeholders and, perhaps, become more sensitized to the sources of resistance they might encounter. And last but certainly not least, scholars engaged in higher education research need to have this book on their shelves to inspire further research into the tensions emanating from this new cyber-cultural logic in higher education that are identified and analyzed in this book.

December 10, 2018

Eileen Trauth, PhD

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Preface

The higher education field is perceived as an economic industry by some and a social entity by others. A related debate is whether higher education is a private or a social good. Amidst these conflicting viewpoints, education is increasingly getting mediated by technologies leading to changes in policies, procedures, and practices, often bringing challenges that need to be addressed. The traditional higher education organizations are responding to these challenges in complex and often contentious ways. The use of technology in teaching practice at the resident as well as online settings is being questioned, leading to another debate about whether technology is really helping or hurting student learning. While these debates provoke thought, they polarize constituents and are often biased. They create roadblocks in progressive transformations toward increasing access to education, improving quality, or reducing cost. Such tensions can be resolved by expanding our perspective that can allow better comprehension of the dynamics governing higher education. And for that, instead of casting higher education narrowly as a social or an economic entity, we need to understand the higher education's multi-dimensional role in our societies and how this role is perceived by its constituents.

The question then is twofold. First, are there perspectives other than those that view higher education as a social or an economic entity that could help resolve or transcend such differences? Second, are there other fields similar to higher education who traversed the path to mediated communication and could offer us some insights into how higher education should navigate its journey to digitization? For this purpose, I conducted a theory-driven multi-level qualitative field study and applied two theories—the theory of institutional logics and the mediatization theory—to come up with a comprehensive framework that addresses some of these questions. I first zoomed into the teaching practice as one of the core functions of higher education and analyzed how it is perceived by teachers, students, and administrators. This was done through a combination of organizational and field-level study. The former was done through 6 organizational case studies, and the latter involved a field-level

analysis of archives spanning over 2 decades and covering over 20 field-level agencies that engage in policy advocacy. I engaged the theory of institutional logics to uncover institutional pluralism that captures higher education's multidimensionality and explains several dynamics summarized next:

1. Higher education in general and teaching practice, in particular, subscribe to a spectrum of institutional logics that extend beyond the bipolar views discussed earlier.
2. These institutional logics coexist in a complex institutional environment conflicting and cooperating with each other in various ways.
3. This institutional pluralism makes change contentious and therefore a challenge. It, in turn, leads to the impression that higher education is too slow and resistant to change.
4. It is this institutional pluralism that has given endurance to the higher education field and made it a highly esteemed sector.

I applied the theory of mediatization, which explains how institutions change when their social communication gets mediated by technology. Fields where communication is central to their function—e.g., performing arts, politics, and religion have undergone mediatization resulting in similar transformations and challenges. Such fields are called cultural institutions as they engage in the exchange of symbolic content. Viewing higher education as a cultural institution, I traced how the mediation of its content-exchange is leading to its mediatization, which in turn is not only changing its prevailing institutional logics but also leading to the emergence of a new cyber-cultural logic.

To reveal institutional pluralism prevailing in the higher education field and to identify changes and emergence of new logics are two important contributions of this study. I have integrated these findings into a framework that addresses as well as transcends the extant debate about why higher education is failing to improve on various fronts despite an urgent need as well as best of intentions and resources. The framework also points to the potential future directions that can be explored to bring sustainable change to the field of higher education.

The book is divided into seven chapters. In Chapter 1, I introduce the basic problem statement and present the gaps in extant research that my research tries to address. In Chapter 2, I elaborate the theories—institutional logics and mediatization—and then develop an integrated analytical framework as my research design to analyze teaching practice in the field of higher education. I also explain how I sampled and collected data from the field, organization, and individual levels. For readers who are interested in the details of my research methodology and techniques, I have further elaborated on the epistemology, the evaluation, and the analysis approach in Appendix B.

In Chapter 3, I discuss key findings at the macro level, focusing on broad patterns and emerging trends in the higher education field. In Chapter 4, I elaborate the findings at an organizational and an individual level, applying some of the theoretical constructs from the theory of institutional logics. I combine the two sets of findings from previous two chapters in Chapter 5 and use mediatization theory to analyze three core entities of teaching practice—teacher, student, and content to draw out how mediatization is impacting each one of them. I synthesize all these findings in Chapter 6 into an integrated view and develop a comprehensive framework that explains the set of prevailing and emerging institutional logics in higher education. Finally, in Chapter 7, I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings and how they can chart a future course of inquiry.

There are two terms that need careful interpretation in this text. The first is distance education, which comprises all forms of education where the student and the teacher are separated in space and/or time. Based on the technology of the day, the distance education models have undergone many changes with the most recent model using Internet technologies generally referred to as ‘online education.’ However, the terms ‘distance’ and ‘online’ education are often used interchangeably. I too will use them interchangeably to avoid making the discussion too technology specific unless required by the context and to allow easier reference to other texts relevant to the topic.

The second term is ‘institution.’ In the higher education field, the organizations offering education are referred to as ‘colleges and universities’ or as ‘higher education institutions.’ Both pose a problem in this context. The former doesn’t cover the upcoming forms of organizations, such as MOOCs and the latter conflicts with the term ‘institution’ in the theory of institutional logic. For these reasons, I will refer to all such entities offering higher education simply as higher education organizations, unless required otherwise by the context.

Acknowledgments

This book is about teaching, and through this book, I express my gratitude to all my teachers who have enriched my educational journey. First and foremost is my PhD advisor Dr. Sandeep Puro. He not only encouraged me to undertake such a project but also lent me free rein to discover what I truly wanted to do. He patiently listened to all the new research ideas that struck my fancy and never rejected them. Like a true coach, he offered his objective critique that sharpened my thinking and helped me focus. Thank you, Sandeep, for being my coach!

Another teacher who I would like to thank is Dr. Eileen Trauth who has been an inspiration and a mentor throughout my doctoral journey and beyond. I learned qualitative research methodology from her, and then she agreed to be my PhD committee member. She is a consummate scholar and a true teacher. She expects a lot from her students and she gives back a lot more in her honest and valuable feedback. Her responsiveness made me see her as a dependable guide that I could always reach out to. Her critiques and reviews have shaped my research in ways that I will always be grateful for.

As I navigated through my doctoral path, there were many individuals who inspired and supported me in unexpected ways and at unexpected times. I would always be thankful to late Dr. Donna Kuga who not only welcomed me into her campus as I entered academia but also fully supported me in my pursuit for a PhD. Ms. Dee Mooney, our academic assistant, was my go-to person to share my troubles and travails. Her simple but reassuring response, “You can do it,” always worked wonders for my otherwise dwindling optimism. Dr. Mary Beth Rosson, our associate dean, trusted me that I could handle the rigor of a PhD program along with my other commitments. Dr. Luke Zhang, also my advisor, offered a new perspective to assess my research findings by helping me zoom out and look at the forest, and not just count the trees. Dr. Rayne Sperling, my committee member, also helped me fine tune my findings to align with the research in the field of education. Dr. Lee Erickson, a fellow non-traditional student who had just graduated when I started, greatly

inspired me by sharing her experiences and helpful do's and don'ts in the PhD pathways.

Conducting doctoral research and writing it up in one's first book are life-changing experiences and I am fortunate that I had so many well-wishers helping and encouraging me at every step. I was a non-traditional doctoral student working full time as an instructor, commuting 300 miles every week to attend classes with peers almost half my age. But as I started my research, a series of coincidences brought me close to a friend, Dr. Sushma Mishra, whose companionship helped me overcome whatever sense of alienation I felt because of my unusual profile. Without her wisdom and help at every critical juncture, I would not have been able to complete this research. Thank you, Sushma!

And then there are those individuals who I cannot name because of the anonymity needed in my research. They were vital in my research as they allowed me to interview them in their organizational settings and helped me understand their day-to-day work. They welcomed me into their worlds, shared their thoughts about their teaching and learning experiences, and introduced me to their colleagues and students. My research stands on their inputs and I am ever so thankful to them for their kind contribution.

Finally, while the research activities took me around, the actual 'research' happened at home through long hours of reading, writing, and staring into the void. During those times, I always had a friend and companion to bounce my thoughts off on. Ashu, my husband, helped me find my balance between the abstract and the real. His keen listening, quick assessments, and sharp questions helped me ground my research to the world around me. Thank you, Ashu, for being my anchor!



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1 Undergraduate Education in the US

Projections and Gaps

There are two deeply contrasting views about the higher education sector in the US. The first view is that it is a highly esteemed sector that represents the most widely adopted Western model of education in the world (Scott 2010; Altbach, Gumport, and Berdahl 2011). The US is considered a world leader in the higher education domain as well as in research. This view is supported by the sector's rich history, its many successes, and worldwide reputation. It has close to 4,800 institutions granting postsecondary year degrees and generates over \$500 billion of revenue per year (McFarland et al. 2017).

But the contrasting view is that the US higher education is ripe for disruption. This view is largely based on an economic outlook using which some have compared the higher education sector with sectors such as manufacturing, retail, and service industry while others have projected higher education's changing DNA to its complete annihilation (Economist 2014; Anson 2007; Martin 2011; Galloway 2017). Peter Drucker predicted in 1997 that the big university campuses would be relics in 30 years (as quoted in Lenzner and Johnson 1997). Christensen and Eyring (2011) applied the theory of disruptive innovation to predict higher education's fate as similar to that of technology industries who lost their strong foothold when low-cost innovators swept their established products out of the market in a few years. As quoted by Selingo (2016), Christensen projected in 2011 that "within 10 to 15 years, the bottom quarter of the market will either go out of business or merge" (5). The frenzied hype around online education led some to say that MOOC is to higher education what Napster was to the music industry (Shirky 2012). These perspectives apply the principles of markets to analyze higher education, comparing it with industries that were disrupted by online technologies. They do explain recent transformations to some extent but ignore higher education's challenge beyond economic sustainability, thus failing to guide future policy regarding higher education's broader role in our society.

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A look at the statistics also doesn't offer much help. From 2000 to 2014, the number of postsecondary institutions that participate in the Title IV federal student financial aid programs increased by 10%, the higher education sector's revenue went up from \$300 billion to \$567 billion, and the total undergraduate enrollments increased by 32%. But the cost of undergraduate education more than doubled, and its four-year graduation rate stagnates at around 55%. Although online education has grown since the government's Title IV funding approval in 1998, only 12.3% of undergraduate students are enrolled exclusively in distance education (IES-NCES 2017b, 2017a; McFarland et al. 2017). Universities are asking the faculty to teach online courses, but the faculty acceptance to online teaching is not moving beyond 30% since 2002 (Allen and Seaman 2015).

These gaps between the projections and the reality beg the question: Are we missing something? Is there an alternate point of view that could explain some of these anomalies? To find such a way, I conducted this research to capture the perspectives held by constituents in the field that directly and indirectly influence the inner workings of the higher education field. The motivation was to step beyond the economic viewpoint to analyze the contemporary forces at play. As the picture of these perspectives developed, the gaps announced themselves, much like in a jigsaw puzzle, revealing a distinctly unique face of higher education in general and teaching practice in particular. While these gaps were visible to some extent at an intuitive level, I bring them forth empirically and synthesize my findings with what the research in the field of higher education has already noted.

Prevailing Perspectives

The evolution of the higher education sector in the US has shifted approximately every 30 years since its foundation in the 17th century, thereby having lived through about ten generations (Geiger 2011). Starting with the generations of colonial colleges followed by republican education, and the classical denominational colleges of the late 19th century, the role of higher education continued to be

cloaked with a public purpose, with a responsibility to the past and the present and the future. The college was expected to give more than it received from the particular young men who were being prepared to do society's work.

(Rudolph 1962, 177)

The higher education sector in the US reached its golden era of academic revolution in the mid-20th century but its transformations since the latter half of the 20th century are viewed as shifting from a "civilizing

agency” serving the society (Clark and Trow 1966, 19) to an industry competing in a marketplace (Slaughter and Rhoades 2011). Its foundational role as a social institution, where a social institution is “an organized activity that maintains, reproduces or adapts itself to implement values that have been widely held and firmly structured by the society,” is being overshadowed by other more pressing economic priorities (Gumport 2000, 73).

Following World War I, massification and vocationalism began to change the intellectual fabric of higher education, which in turn led to its shift from a social to an industry outlook (Clark and Trow 1966). The function of higher education dramatically diversified from simply educating the elite to “educating the masses, advancing knowledge through research, contributing to economic development by employing and producing workers, and developing industry applications” (Gumport 2000, 74). In the 1970s, enrollments slowed down, the Higher Education Act got amended to make federal loans available directly to students, academic research started getting privatized and thus academic capitalism emerged in the field of higher education (Geiger 2011; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). The metaphor of higher education changed from being a social institution to that of an industry, and the vocabulary changed from trust and prestige to market competition, accountability, customer service, and profit. The focus of higher education shifted from the quality of learning to access and then cost, changing higher education’s focus to efficient administration and management of services (Scott 2010). The challenge of balancing the social versus industrial identity led researchers to offer higher education’s critical assessments (Gumport 2000), normative prescriptions (Zemsky, Wegner, and Massy 2005; Hendrickson et al. 2013), and analytical explanations (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004).

The post-World War II period from 1945–75 also witnessed what Geiger (2011) termed as the phase of academic revolution. In this era, the college-student population grew several folds, and the federal largesse boosted scientific research that “produced an ephemeral golden age in American higher education” (61). The academic role acquired a scholarly status, making research, teaching, and service integral to its definition. The perspective that aligns with this image was termed by Clark and Trow (1966) as an academic culture, which identifies with faculty members’ intellectual concerns and students’ passion for pursuing knowledge. Such a mindset was encouraged in research universities as well as liberal arts colleges that valued scholarly pursuits. And teaching was

based primarily in the arts and sciences, sought to engage students in a broad range of human thought and achievement and to foster the habits of inquiry that lead to both heightened understanding and the creation and refinement of knowledge.

(Zemsky, Wegner, and Massy 2005, 128)

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While this mindset still governs some aspects of higher education, it is getting diluted with capitalism taking over academic priorities (Slaughter and Rhoades 2011).

Apart from these three perspectives—social, industry, and academic—there are finer variations that reflect a spectrum of contradicting missions in the field. For example, liberal arts versus practical and vocational training; prestige versus profits; and quality versus access versus efficiency (Scott 2010). Small liberal arts colleges have been traditionally associated with the mission of citizen building, representing social institution more closely. However, large private and public universities are portrayed as closer to capitalistic institutions following the industry, especially private ones (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Altbach 1999).

The turn of the 21st century introduced a new dimension to this mix as information and communication technologies started altering the mechanisms adopted by higher education to achieve the variety of its missions. The online education phenomenon is just one in the series of attempts made by the sector to promote distance education. The distance education started as being paper-based, and as technologies evolved, it adopted radio, television, and now the Internet. According to a report published by the Institute of Education Sciences—National Center of Education Statistics (IES-NCES), the percentage of students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs in the non-profit sector (public or private) is over 90%. From within this population, the percentage of students enrolled exclusively in four-year distance education courses is 14%. In comparison, the percentage of the student population enrolled in online education in the for-profit sector is 61%. These statistics may lead one to think that online education is driven by profit motivation, much like an industry. But there are many non-profit organizations such as the University of People and Saylor Academy that have adopted online mechanisms to pursue their social motivations. The mediation of instructional content manifests on both sides of the social vs. industry spectrum, irrespective of profit motivations or lack thereof. However, when viewed through an academic perspective, online education is failing to gain acceptance because many teachers are resisting the mediation of their teaching. Different stakeholders in the field of higher education interpret this resistance differently. Some attribute this resistance to the observation that faculty members perceive online education to be of lower quality because of the loss of face-to-face interaction and lack of student engagement. Others think that most academics view online education as a purely economic venture that deviates from the loftier academic mission. Some also think that teachers view online education as a threat to job security, or simply do not want to change their old ways of doing things. Whatever may be the reasons behind this resistance, it is evident that there are factors other than profit or social welfare that contribute to the success or failure of online education. This means that the cost of higher education