

VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGIES GROWING IN IMPORTANCE



The consequences of the coronavirus crisis are global and have caused an economic and social halt in numerous communities, even forcing people to opt for social distancing and self-isolation. Important sectors such as industry, transport, tourism, and education evaluate the consequences that COVID-19 may have on their performance and plan actions to deal with it while preventing it from spreading. Virtual technologies are growing in importance in

many fields of business, but especially education.

Over the past few months, numerous sports, business and leisure events have been canceled due to the risk of coronavirus. Since those events must be attended in person and sharing a space with others, the high chance of being exposed to the virus has **led to their immediate cancellation in most cases, while others have simply been postponed in the hopes of the emergency being over sooner than later.**

Regarding education, the risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 among students attending classes in the same educational environment is quite worrisome as well, making it dangerous to have large groups of students in closed spaces, such as a classroom. Since the virus makes it impossible for students to gather, virtual technologies have a true potential to face this scenario.

Virtual environments and technologies have been growing and developing for years thanks to terms such as 'Anytime, Anywhere' learning, or 'Learning by Doing', but before the risk of coronavirus spreading, their expectations as educational resources have increased considerably.

The main argument in favor of these technologies in an educational setting is that students do not have to be present in the space or room where education takes place and the possibility of sharing goals and virtual non-physical models. Among the main virtual technologies to fight against the spread of coronavirus in educational environments are:

Learning Management System (LMS): online learning management systems offer a virtual environment in which we can learn and train through the Internet. It allows both teachers and students to manage and participate in different learning activities scheduled within an online teaching or e-learning process.

Virtual Reality (VR): the possibility of designing virtual environments through a combined system of software and hardware is giving rise to the creation of a number of tools in which, through an avatar (basically a virtual character), users can interact in the same virtual space.

Augmented Reality (AR): this disruptive technology allows creating an interactive experience within the user's actual physical space, visualizing different virtual models and sharing them with other users. In this way, many users can work collaboratively and without having to be in the same room.

These past weeks, the world has seen the temporary closure and cancellation of educational activities due to coronavirus. **At the international level, many educational centers have closed,**

but it hasn't been ruled out that these measures taken may be enforced in other centers or even continue in the medium term.

The advantages of these new technologies demand an immediate investment in human and technical resources for their implementation and subsequent development since educational activities could be paused for a longer time, and while one of the most benefited sectors is the educational one, the fact that these technologies are adaptive, scalable and allow for virtual gatherings, represents a huge potential for any industry.

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