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ПОСТПАНДЕМИЧЕСКОЕ БУДУЩЕЕ УНИВЕРСИТЕТА: ВОЗМОЖНЫЕ МОДЕЛИ, ИХ ПОТЕНЦИАЛ И РИСКИ

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Для исследователей, преподавателей, специалистов-практиков и студентов, интересующихся проблемами социальных коммуникаций и новых медиа, а также вопросами менеджмента в сфере высшего образования.

CONNECT UNIVERSUM 2020

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POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE
OF THE UNIVERSITY:
POSSIBLE MODELS,
POTENTIAL AND RISKS

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The issue is intended for scientists, researchers, professors, practitioners, and students interested in social communications, the new media and higher education management.

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THE 'NEW NORMAL' FOR THE UNIVERSITY: THE 'ONLIFE' APPROACH

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Abstract. The COVID19 pandemic has prompted every university to strengthen online relationship management for students, professors, researchers, and administrative officials. The heavy use of online activity appears to reduce students' perception of the difference between online universities and traditional universities. For this reason, students are searching for elements of differentiation to decide where to focus their efforts in the coming years. The aim of this paper is to use the 'onlife' concept to explain how a traditional university can integrate online and 'onplace' activities in order to create differentiation elements through pure online distance learning – the university. Places, policymakers, university staff and stakeholders, combining online activities with local culture, perspectives, case studies and 'onplace' experiences enrich the experience of students and professors, highlighting the distinction of online universities.
Key words: pandemic, university, place marketing, online, onplace, onlife

Introduction

In the first phase of the emergence of Covid19, new technologies supported each organization facilitating remote contact, meeting and, in some situations, simply ensuring business continuity (Nicola et al. 2020). In traditional universities, Internet connection created limits and opportunities for officers, researchers and professors to continue administrative activities, reinterpret and manage lectures, research activities, and internal and external contact with students and stakeholders (Almaiah, 2020).

The difficulties encountered have spurred each university to increase the frequency of online contacts with students (Rapanta et al.2020). For this reason, the difference between online and traditional universities has narrowed. This raised some more doubts among students regarding the choice to go to an online university or a traditional university. In particular, some students are currently evaluating the benefits and costs of distance learning over traditional university studies, which may have higher costs, especially when students need to relocate to another country. On the other hand, online universities are not suitable for students living in countries with limited infrastructure and limited Internet connections (Muthuprasad et al., 2021). For this reason, traditional universities should justify real benefits and differences with an online university to overcome the cost-benefit ratio that students can take into account, especially for universities without a recognized brand positioning.

Regardless of the pandemic, most societies are deeply connected and entangled with technology, and it is difficult to understand which actions or choices are performed entirely offline and which actions or decisions are eventually integrated by an online influence. This situation can be referred to the concept of 'Onlife', proposed by Floridi in 2007 to describe the context in which offline and online experience and life are inextricably intertwined. It is a state in which people's lives, choices and experiences are mediated and influenced by systemic and integrated effects generated by both online and offline experiences. Universities can consider these conditions to highlight strengths and opportunities for both students, locations, and universities themselves, working on relationships and expanding online contacts with students and other stakeholders.

In order to find an alternative interpretation of the traditional university role in countries and highlight the elements of the difference between an online university and a traditional one - in terms of a place marketing perspective – the university onlife approach is presented. In particular, this ap-

proach includes online and offline integration in order to create specific differentiation between the value propositions of different universities in different countries.

First of all, the theoretical background presents the place marketing base of the work and the onlife concept; this is followed by a presentation about the impact of the pandemic on traditional universities. The article ends with a presentation of the onlife approach to traditional universities.

Theoretical background

There is a brief theoretical background below, which is divided into three key points to provide some literary notes useful in explaining the thesis of the work: 1. The evolution of distance learning in the university, that has passed from being a complement for traditional universities to being a critical asset. The pandemic has increased confusion in identifying the differences between an online university and a traditional one; 2. The place marketing framework and the role of technology supporting the need to combine tangible and intangible assets of the place. Place actors are resource integrators, and place identity contributes to the differentiation of place stakeholders, including the university; 3. The onlife approach explains the interconnection of societies characterized by the interweaving of online and offline situations.

Online activity and universities. In the decades before the pandemic, several universities around the world experimented with online activities to deliver lectures, seminars, exchange documents and provide a variety of services, combining traditional activities with online activities (Shea et al., 2005). The evolution and diffusion of distance learning universities (Birch et al., 2009) have prompted traditional universities to reflect on the future and evolution of traditional learning. Therefore, traditional universities are looking for the integration of classic and physical activity, for example, with the addition of recorded lectures or online contacts and seminars.

The pandemic has exacerbated this tendency and made it more acute, even with a specific impact on the people involved. In particular, during the first phase of COVID19 pandemic, new technologies have provided strong support for traditional university activities (Nicola et al. 2020), even encouraging traditional teaching universities to review lectures, research activities, and internal and external contact with students (Rapanta et al.2020) and stakeholders (Almaiah, 2020). This activity has brought both benefits and limits for university users. For example, there were difficulties in connecting to Internet for some students (Muthuprasad et al., 2021), difficulties for professors in giving lectures (Bao, 2020; Mukhtar et al.2020), psychological difficulties caused both by the fast change because of the pandemic and by the rapid acceleration for online activities (Sahu, 2020). The partially highlighted constraints encourage traditional universities to question the future, assessing how online and offline contact with the direct and indirect stakeholders are regulated.

Place marketing, technology and the role of universities. Place marketing is a discipline that has been studied since the early 90s and although the first perspectives were based on place promotion (Ave, 1993; Borchert, 1994; Schmidt, 1993), recent approaches consider the place marketing structure to be a strategic approach (Gertner, 2011) that goes beyond pure communication and becomes the practical need for suggesting specific meanings and identities to the place value proposition (Parker, 2008; Bruni, 2014; Asworth 2016). In this context, the university can take a relevant role as an appropriate actor for place development (Chatterton, 2000) and meta-manager between policy makers and internal and external stakeholders (Sansone et al. 2012). By following the place marketing in terms of value co-creation, every internal and external stakeholder can participate in the application of their competencies to create benefits for other parties involved in resource integration and service exchange (Bruni, Caboni, 2017).

In this context, universities play a critical role in encouraging cultural development and technology adoption in places that attract research, projects, people and ideas (Florida, 2002; 2005; Berry & Glaeser, 2005; Glaeser & Berry, 2006). In terms of technology, its use to communicate and stimulate the interaction with users and consumers is nothing new (O'Brien and Toms, 2008), and technology has been at the forefront of the university, society and places development in recent

years (Winter et al., 2017). Technology is developing rapidly and affecting everyday life. For example, it affects one-to-onecommunication with mobile devices and the Internet of Things (Miorandi et al., 2012; Gubbi et al., 2013), optimization of city management through SMART city projects (Caragliu et al., 2013; Zanella et al., 2014), and even companies and industries (e.g., Industry 4.0) (Brettel et al., 2014). Thus, all of this has an impact on society and place.

The onlife concept. Onlife is rather a 'new word' invented by Floridi (2007;2013). This word explains that 'onlife' is a condition in which people's lives, choices and activities are mediated and influenced by systemic and integrated effects created by online and offline means and experiences.

For example, Floridi says *'our offline and online experiences and lives are inextricably* linked. In the work 'onlife manifesto'(Floridi, 2015), it is explained how online media and technology are heavily influencing our life (Simon and Ess, 2015). In this paper, this concept is used to explain how universities can help people (students, professors, and stakeholders) to fully immerse in real life of the region where a university is located, and at the same time get support from online technology to understand, interact, create and manage experiences both online and onplace.

Online pressure on traditional activities: focus on universities

During the pandemic, every organization in the world reorganized its activity changing its usual management and adapting it to the 'new normal' (Buheji and Buheji, 2020). Response efforts have been focusing on increasing knowledge, technology adoption, technical capabilities and safety devices. In each sector, few keywords lead the adaptation to the 'new normal': safety, confidence, help and care. All traditional activities or organizations, such as brick-and-mortar retailers, have been involved in managing the difficulties caused by the pandemic and have strengthened the organization to respond quickly, for instance, through the introduction of new technologies and, in particular, web contacts.

In the first phase of the pandemic, organizations from every sector, including retailers and traditional universities, had a common starting point, characterized by the limits and opportunities of online pressure, which are summarized in the following SWOT analysis (Table 1). This analysis adapts to the context of every organization, from companies and associations to universities.

T a b l e 1

**SWOT analysis representing the starting point for a company (e.g., a traditional retailer)
during the period of pandemic adaptation to online pressures**

Strengths	Weaknesses
The relevance of onplace experience User relationship and satisfaction management Clear mission and vision integrated with the place/region	Lack of capital to invest for technology Against network creation Individualism Unavailability to change The web and e-marketplaces as enemies to fight
Opportunities	Threats
Simple online tools ready to use Users ask for service innovation The fast growth of knowledge to share Online and Onplace activities have a positive experience in the service industry	Lacks of external support for technology updates Continuous development of online offerings Cheaper online offerings

Authors' elaboration.

Using the previous ideas, the results are commented on in the following table (Table 2), which compares the traditional retailer logic (brick-and-mortar) with traditional university logic. It is interesting to assess the homogeneity of the interpretation of the two SWOT principles. Although the retailer and the traditional university operate in different industries, they both come from a certain level of technology and have the goal to respond to emerging complexity (pandemic) by using strengths, reducing weaknesses, exploiting opportunities and protecting the organization from

threats. Both organizations (retailer and the university) have to manage their relationship and integration of resources with the environment to survive the difficulties and online pressure.

<div align="right">T a b l e 2</div>

Emerging homogeneity in the SWOT analysis of company's and university's response to online pressure

	Elements	Traditional retailer	Traditional university
Strengths	The relevance of onplace experience; User relationship and satisfaction management; Clear mission and vision integrated with the place/region	The experience of a brick-and-mortar shop represents its normal life. The traditional retailer has direct contact with the customer as this is the first strength and the achievement of its own goal is strictly connected with the microenvironment and relationships around the shop	Contact with students is the first pillar of traditional universities. In particular, each traditional university is often characterized by the place where it operates positively and negatively. This is a strong key difference from other universities
Weaknesses	Lack of investment in technology; Against network creation; Individualism; Unavailability to change; The web and e-marketplaces as enemies to fight	Individualism, a reluctance to change, and sometimes lack of investment in technology are some of the retailer's worst constraints and weaknesses. Although the role of online has been considered as an opportunity to communicate recently, e-commerce and e-marketplaces are always seen as enemies to fight	In traditional universities, cooperation is often limited, especially when it comes to cooperation between universities from different locations in the same country. The limits of the concept of change are always present, especially when universities need to modify their organization. Like traditional retailers, distance learning and Internet are considered to be strengths of distance learning universities, which are sometimes seen as competitors in education
Opportunities	Simple online tools ready to use; Users ask for service innovation; The fast growth of knowledge to share; Online and Onplace activities have a positive experience in the service industry	Regardless of the pandemic, Internet offers many opportunities for traditional retailers. Online tools are useful for improving sales and deepening knowledge. There are opportunities to integrate online activities with traditional ones. Sometimes these opportunities are underestimated due to lack of knowledge or interest in investments with medium to long term impact	Traditional universities can be considered to have the same opportunities, and since the approach is the same as presented in the retailer's box, it is possible to say that, with a few exceptions, online tools were viewed by traditional universities only as an 'add-on', which assumed a relevant role only because of the pandemic (with a system of associated difficulties)
Threats	Lacks of external support for technology update; Continuous development of online offerings; Cheaper online offerings	Alternative online offerings and the development of e-commerce create difficulties for traditional retailers who cannot manage such activities or, eventually, offer an alternative that will be positively recognized by customers. The future will be characterized by higher pressure on the traditional retailer through cheaper online offering	Over the past 20 years, distance learning universities (online universities) around the world have often been considered a valuable alternative to the traditional university. In particular, traditional universities with no clear rankings may face competition from mostly cheap online learning offerings

Authors' elaboration.

In distance learning universities' online channels are used to manage and communicate core activities. The context of the study for a student is characterized by 'online context' and no influences come from third parties or from the place and its culture. In this type of university, students have online contacts with professors and limited contacts with other peers. In contrast, the traditional (onplace) university presents a complex context, the impact of people, society, opportunities and threats that real life offers and the students may experience. As an example, let's think of the international students that are having experience of living in a country, learning a new language or, getting to know cultural heritage of the place – simply living in a city/country during their university life. The value proposition of this type of the university is a sum of experiences that come from widespread knowledge, people who attend the university and the place where one can experience limits and opportunities of the city (or country) where the university is located.

The comparative analysis in Table 2 explains the need to consider the integration between traditional and online activities. In any case, it is necessary to find a specific goal to link the strengths of 'onplace' organization (in particular, the university) and the opportunities arising from the online evolution.

In this work, given the place marketing context and the results obtained from the specific research streams previously presented, it seems that the solution could be identified in the place as system of assets and actors that might contribute to the characterization of a traditional university and at the same time the place could benefit from the university's efforts in terms of culture, knowledge, and place identity diffusion around the world. To explain this situation characterized by integration of resources and online and offline interaction, the 'onlife' approach can help to explain the confluence of online influences on offline life and the associated outcomes.

Onlife approach in the world

'Onlife' is an interconnected condition where online information and activities create continuous effects on people's offline life (Floridi, 2007). It is impossible to differentiate life and behaviour when people are connected or disconnected. For example, the onlife concept explains what we can learn from behaviour and how we can manage it, considering the emergence of onlife experience.

For instance, people with smartphones live 'onlife' because they integrate their choices (in real life – offline) making decisions according to the information they get 'online' by search engines or specialized websites or by simply watching YouTube tutorials. In smart urban projects, people are connected and integrated with technology and advanced services coming from the smart cities.

The university is another example for 'onlife' experience as it is simple to recognize the integration between technology, ordinary life and Internet services. The online addiction is not the only thing that turns a context into a 'onlife' context. It is necessary to understand that languages, rules, tools and purposes of each actor involved (online and offline) can be integrated and joint but there are limits in some universities at the moment.

It is necessary to make a step from an added online experience to an 'onlife' experience. That is possible thanks to the real focus on people and places that characterize traditional universities.

Onlife approach to universities

Since the online activity for universities is not only an 'add-on', in order to overcome the simple application of online approach to the traditional university, it is necessary to plan a next step, which we call 'onlife' approach. Universities should be encouraged to consider online activities as part of their normal value proposition and it is necessary to use online activity to build a strong connection between the university, people and place where this university is located. Integration is crucial because it is impossible to innovate without involving people and their efforts as it is impossible to make revolutions without participation.

There is a three-step path to introduce the onlife approach to traditional universities.

T a b l e 3

A three-step path introducing the onlife approach to traditional universities

STEP1. Regulation of intensity of online activity
STEP2. Choice of the right software to work obtaining professional outcomes and results
STEP3. Integration of online activities with the onplace experience and, at the same time, online media should enhance the opportunities for recognition of the university's value proposition and mission

Authors' elaboration.

Firstly (STEP1), it is necessary to consider that each activity within the traditional university might be integrated via online, but every action should be regulated in terms of effective use. For example, it is essential to record videos and make content for the online use. Otherwise (for example, just taking a video from face-to-face lectures), it can give a distorted result because each media

should be used taking into account its limits and opportunities. That is, online lectures should be designed with the characteristics required for online learning.

The same thing is with choosing the useful software (STEP2). The software should not be expensive for students and it should be user friendly, including social media. For this reason, it is necessary to balance the intelligence of the software with the professional outcomes to ensure the highest level of connection between the online and offline experience.

The third step (STEP3) highlights the need for integration of goals. Each university stakeholder interested in the university development should contribute to the media use to demonstrate that connection with the place is valuable for the university, people and students. An 'onlife' university should integrate stakeholders' experiences into the delivery of the university knowledge in order to create a knowledge characterization (for instance, integrate the contributions of companies that are truly active in the place, showing the place perspective in terms of business and international relationship). At the same time, it is necessary to always encourage students to interact with the cultural heritage and with the local language since both of them represent the true heart and soul of a country (for instance, cause a desire to visit places physically and to be part of real university life, when it is possible, encourage professors to invite managers and people from 'real life' to demonstrate case studies during the lectures regardless of the subject).

This is possible by integrating online and onplace activities at any time of the university activity and in order to apply the 'onlife' approach to traditional universities, some guidelines follow (Table 4, 5, 6).

T a b l e 4

Improvement of the university's value proposition

Virtual and augmented reality in laboratories.
Integrating the online resources with traditional lectures.
Using the online resources for direct contact with students before, during and after the enrolment.
Reducing the time for professor meetings and increasing the number of meetings with students.
Online activity increases the chances to be on time for meetings and lectures.
Identify how to reduce offline activity to reduce pollution.
Flexible time integrating online and offline

Authors' elaboration.

Consideration should be given to improving the university's value proposition by integrating digital and online technologies into traditional lectures and laboratory activities, for example, by creating specific content available to students during and after lectures (integrating materials or, for example, creating content with basic principles or background information on the topic).

It is also interesting to use online activity to increase the number of contacts with students before, during and after the enrolment at the national and international levels (having contacts with high schools, connecting professors with university students, connecting alumni with the university, providing free lectures online, creating YouTube channels with open and free lectures useful for managers and interested people).

At the same time, as it is shown below (Table 5), it is useful to strengthen the connection between the university, place and its stakeholders.

T a b l e 5

Encouraging local and online participation

Integrate lectures and seminars with digital content, online resources and external contributions from different countries around the world.
Encourage professors to cooperate with stakeholders from 'real life' - if possible, link subjects to practice activities describing the place offer in terms of companies, cultural heritage, practice case studies in the city/country where a university is located.
Encourage students to work on case studies and activities useful for the online offerings of the university.
Create a need to physically visit places and a need to be part of real university life by actually and virtually designing each activity as a double event that should create enjoyable content online and offline.
Create shared initiatives – online and onplace –

Authors' elaboration.

The traditional university can integrate online initiatives and onplace activities as parts of the same strategy. Digital technology and online activity should be used to establish contacts with entrepreneurs, managers, professionals. These subjects can include speeches, projects and student participation in company life to enrich subjects within particular and professional topics without wasting time traveling to the university. This can lead to a need to visit places physically and a need to be part of real university life as actually as virtually.

Each initiative should be communicated according to a strategy appropriate to the marketing addresses, even balancing the university's brand-building process. Table 6 shows the relevant key points.

T a b l e 6

Improving communication and engagement

Investing in digital technology (video making, editing, script, teacher support for recording).
Involving filmmakers and screenwriters who are experts in movie making to define 'onplace' university communication.
Involving video and web communication experts (Youtubers, influencers, etc.) to define the university's online communication and related content.
Involving the community of youngsters in the creation of engaging content for new students

Authors' elaboration.

The online content should be well studied by 'experts' in digital communication and the Internet content. Likewise, it is necessary to use online and technology to expand onplace experience (for example, consider integrating virtual reality and augmented reality into daily physical work). When working on online content, in order to integrate it into the 'onplace' activities, it is crucial to involve young people in setting goals, content constraints, speaking, time and communication.

Conclusion

The 'onlife' approach to the university is focused on people, place and knowledge, and traditional universities should be perceived differently by distance learning universities especially when a university adopts the 'onlife' approach characterized by a strong connection between place participation and the university online and offline value proposition. Students have to understand that the difference between an online university and an 'onlife' university is an enriched and integrated experience characterized by full immersion in the social context of the place where the university is physically built and by the ability to enjoy the content of the university through online media that are completely integrated with real life of the place.

This approach has some limitations. It can be said that numerous information and communication opportunities are not always transformed in competencies for people; it is not always possible to gain additional knowledge by integrating online and onplace content, even if it is well organized. In addition, 'onlife' approach for universities can be limited by cyberattacks, so data management and privacy policies can reduce project development opportunities. For this reason, it can become a solution to regulate relationships and agreements with ICT companies in order to have control over their activities.

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