

Online education, the way forward

• Uma Kannan

India's online education market is set to grow to \$1.96 billion and around 9.6 million users by 2021 from \$247 million and around 1.6 million users in 2016. A study by KPMG in India and Google titled 'Online Education in India: 2021' says that reskilling and online certifications is the largest category today at \$93 million.

With an estimated 280 million students expected to be enrolled in schools by 2021 and increasing adoption amongst this target audience, online primary and secondary supplemental education is expected to be the dominant category of courses with a 39% market share in 2021. AEON Learning Private Limited (AEON), founded in 2013, is a Bengaluru-based edtech company, focused on online degree programmes and skill development courses. It comprises of two platforms namely Avagmah, which provides online learning courses through partner universities and Acadgild which specialises in emerging new age technologies. "At around the same time when we launched AEON Learning, the Government of India had announced the target it had set itself: to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education (GER) from 23% to 30%. For this fig-

ure to fructify, effective use of technology was the only way forward.

We knew that through the right use of technology, we could ensure that the highest levels of quality were maintained, which would immensely benefit students. What we were staring at was the projection of an \$8 billion market size by 2020 with over 25% of all education moving online," Karthik KS, co-founder and CEO of AEON Learning said. The KPMG-Google study also points out that online test preparation is expected to be the fastest growing category of online education, estimated to grow at an impressive CAGR of 64% in the next 5 years. AEON reaches to over 22,000

students across 66 countries. Through its Avagmah platform, it provides continuing higher education degrees from its partner universities including IIM-Bangalore, All India Management Association (AIMA), NMIMS Mumbai, and Institute of Metro and Rail Technology (IMRT), among others. Some of the popular courses on this platform are MBA in Marketing, MBA in Human Resources, MBA in Finance, MBA in International Business, PGDM

in Marketing Management, Diploma in Supply Chain Management, and many more. "Through our Acadgild platform, we offer niche emerging technology courses like Big Data, Data Science, Data Analytics, Android Programme Development, Full Stack Web Development, Blockchain, Digital Marketing and more. We have over 35 courses on both platforms - Avagmah and Acadgild," he added.

On Acadgild platform, technology courses range between Rs 15,000 and Rs 60,000. On Avagmah platform, the management courses fall in the range of Rs 40,000 to Rs 1,00,000 and above.

The platform has observed a huge demand for management courses among mid to senior level working professionals. "A large number of these professionals hail from Tier-II and Tier-III cities who are unable to migrate to bigger towns owing to personal and professional commitments and yet yearn for quality education.

There is a substantial demand for reskilling among IT professionals and corporates owing to the changing technology and digitisation

scenario across industries," Karthik said.

He said that online education is witnessing more acceptance in India today compared to a few years ago. "Even UGC and the Indian government have realised the need for online education to meet the GER (Gross Enrollment Ratio) and skilling targets.

This can be validated by their initiatives towards granting several universities the authority to offer online degrees and by investing in online skilling initiatives by NITI Aayog and NSDC. Recently, the government has mandated 15% of Indian universities to deliver online degree courses, which again, is a reassuring step towards the adoption of online education," he informed. Student engagement is a challenge as far as online learning is concerned, especially since it involves virtual teaching.

It is therefore of utmost importance for faculty to use effective strategies to keep students motivated right through the learning process. This is one of the reasons why there have been several cases of slow course completion rates in the past.

The market is surely witnessing rapid evolution and adoption rates but we are yet to reach a point where everyone realises the optimum potential of online learning," he said.

Online test preparation is expected to be the fastest growing category of online education, estimated to grow at an impressive CAGR of 64% in the next 5 years