

**Exploring the feasibility of a socially enriched learning environment in the  
field of ODL : A case study of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open  
University**

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**Abstract**

There has been a massive shift in the dissemination of information through different educational tools and platforms. Gone are the days when students used to flock to traditional universities and colleges in order to take admission into different academic programmes and obtain their respective degrees. However, things have changed for the better. Open and distance learning has come as a boon for those learners who for some reason or the other were not able to complete their education. In fact, it serves as an alternative mode to the traditional educational system. ODL system is also the most preferred form of choice for the working professionals who need to obtain a certain degree for promotional purposes. This particular paper intends to explore and assess the feasibility of social media platforms which can serve as one of the important forms of support services . More specifically such support services become very much pertinent in distance mode. Social media platforms can actually offer a plethora of information to the learners ranging from academic to administrative issues. In fact, it helps to maintain a sense of communication with one another, build learning communities, enhance content sharing, leverage user-generated content, encourage collaboration and promote peer learning . This paper will look into the different online and social media tools that are offered by Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Guwahati for engaging the learners in different academic discussions and activities thereby reducing drop-out ratio. Qualitative analysis will be done , particularly content analysis in order to look into the feasibility of using social networking platforms by KKHSOU for learning purposes . Besides, an exploratory study of the web portal of the University will be done to look into the possibility of using it as a viable platform for discussion as far as distance education is concerned.

***Keywords : Open and Distance Learning, KKHSOU, Social Media, Social Media Platforms***

## **Introduction**

We all know that education definitely plays an important role in the society. However, it becomes difficult for the traditional universities and colleges to absorb all of the learners within its purview due to limited seat capacity. Thereby, distance education has come as a blessing to those who desires to obtain degree and diploma in various academic programmes. The field of open and distance education has undergone sea change in terms of the technologies that are incorporated for delivering support services to the learners. Initially, there was the Correspondence Model which was also the first generation of distance education. Here, emphasis was given on learning materials which are commonly known as self-learning materials. Very soon, the print materials paved the way for audio and video technologies which was very much evident in the Multi-media Model which was the third generation model of distance education. Audio CDs were widely used and distributed to the learners so as to enable them to understand the learning matter in a better way. Thereafter, came the Tele-learning Model which was the third generation of distance education. This particular model made use of telecommunication technologies in order to provide opportunities for synchronous communication. The Flexible Learning Model which was the fourth generation of distance education model focused on delivering content through online mode like providing information through the medium of internet . The last and the final distance education model was the Intelligent Flexible Learning Model which was actually based on the interactive nature of the Internet.

So, we have seen that distance learning has gained prominence in the last decade or so as an alternative medium to conventional educational system. Basically distance education is a process of providing the learners with learning resources, both in online and offline mode. A lot of emphasis is being given on ICT these days as it streamlines the learning process making it more interesting and informative. Such form of technology has made a massive impact in teaching and learning process both in conventional and distance mode. More specifically, its

impact in the area of open and distance learning is immense. This is mainly because of the fact that unlike conventional or traditional mode of educational system, the learners under open and distance education are not directly in touch with their respective instructors except for counselling classes that are held during weekends. So, when learners are not constantly in touch with the instructors or the counsellors, they tend to feel demotivated or isolated. This feeling of isolation can very often affect their study patterns leading them to drop out of the respective programmes. This is because, when someone is without any guidance for a prolonged period of time, then he or she might get diverted from their field of study with no proper guidance. Here, by guidance we are talking about showing how lessons should be planned in advance (as far as self-learning materials are concerned ). Apart from lesson planning, learners also face a lot of problems during examination, writing of home assignments, filling up online examination forms etc. So, if such kind of services are not provided to them on a timely manner, then there is every possibility of the concerned learner to leave the academic programme midway. Hence, certain services are provided to the learners which would go a long way in enriching their holistic and emotional wellbeing. These services are commonly known as learners' support services. These support services have come to occupy an important place in the whole teaching-learning process. Library facilities, laboratory facilities, self-learning materials, provision of social media platforms for interaction and dissemination of knowledge, radio counselling, offline counselling etc. are some of the commonly used learners' support services. These support services have in a way brought the learners closer together with the instructors or the counsellors. When the learners feel a sense of connection , they automatically feel the need to pursue their respective academic programmes. Speaking of online learning platforms or resources, social media has been able to make its presence felt in the field of ODL. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) has been a pioneering institution of open and distance education making use of both conventional and online learning resources

for delivery of learner's support services . Hence, it is only befitting that this educational institution has been taken up as a case study to introspect the area under concern for the benefit of all.

### **Objectives of the present study**

The main objectives of the present study are –

- i. To analyse the importance of having a socially enriching learning environment in the field of ODL
- ii. To introspect the feasibility of social media platforms as new Academic spaces specifically in the field of distance education
- iii. To look into the advantages and disadvantages of making use of social media platforms in the context of ODL

### **Methodology of the study**

The researcher makes use of qualitative analysis in order to assess the importance of having a socially enriching learning environment in the field of distance education. Besides , data has also been collected from a few secondary sources like journals, books, magazines etc. in order to look into the feasibility of having a socially enriching environment with special reference to Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU).

### **The growing importance of social media in the field of education**

The importance of social media platforms for the purpose of debates, discussions and dissemination of knowledge has been growing up by leaps and bounds. Commonly used social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, MySpace etc. have changed the way communication takes place. If one analyses the pre and post COVID scenario

the world over, one will find that there has been a paradigm shift in the teaching-learning process. Earlier, learning took place within the four walls of the classroom within a specified time frame. However, in the post COVID period, more and more emphasis is given on online platforms more specifically social media sites as they tend to be easy to use and cuts down on the time taken for generating feedback. Learners and instructors rely on such form of interactive platforms for engaging in two-way form of communication. For instance, if an instructor or a teacher wants to assign any kind of assignment to the learners, he or she will not necessarily ask the learners to prepare a note on it. Rather they will ask the learners to delve into the matter and analyse it from a critical point of view. They might also ask the learners to utilise the online resources to add more depth and meaning to the assigned project or report. It also leads to enhancement of IT skills among the learners.

Social media has gained importance over the past couple of years in the field of education for several reasons as outlined below-

***Accessibility:*** Different social media sites and platforms gives an opportunity to the learners to access a plethora of information related to different areas of study. These days most of the educational institutions have their own home pages that can be followed on various social media platforms. When one subscribes or follows such pages, they can get updated news and information about different courses and other examination related matters. Specially in the field of open and distance learning, learners are able to learn at their own pace and as per their convenience.

***Increase in engagement:*** Since the learners are able to interact with their peers and instructors virtually across different social media platforms, so the chances of interactivity increases. This becomes more pronounced when the learners bond over some common grounds. For instance, a learner belonging to a certain academic background will feel more connected to someone

belonging to the same academic field. This feeling of bonhomie ultimately results in strengthening the relationship among themselves leading to discussion on a variety of issues. Most of the educational institutions these days try to encourage the learners to engage in online discussion. This not only enhances the interpersonal communication but also helps the concerned learners to develop their intellectual ability.

***Leads to collaborative practices:*** Collaboration becomes imminent when learners interact with one another through online platforms like Facebook Groups, Slack, and Discord. Ideas can be shared and peer support can be provided outside the classroom.

***Aids in networking:*** Interaction and collaboration automatically brings in networking. Networking is important not only from the point of view of building friendships but also in exchanging important information related to professional front. Since most of the learners pursuing their academic programmes under open and distance learning are working professionals, so such form of networking actually helps to connect with experts and peers in their respective fields of study. This can lead to mentorship, internships, job opportunities, and access to industry insights.

***Enhances Personalized Learning:*** Personalized learning is the current buzzword among the current crop of educationists the world over. Each learner is different and as such learning needs must be tailored to suit each one of them. Personalized learning is widely considered an innovative approach to learning that creates learning plans for each student based on their strengths, needs, skills and interests. When learning is provided in such a way, the learners feel left out or demotivated. In fact, it helps the learners stay motivated and engaged.

***Global outreach :*** Social media has cut down the geographical boundaries and has brought people closer together simply by engaging in real time discussions on different issues. It is cost effective, less time consuming and economical in nature. So naturally, most of the people

specially the youngsters make use of social networking sites and platforms in order to connect with educators and resources from around the world. This global perspective exposes learners to diverse viewpoints and cultures, enriching their educational experience.

***Real-world Application:*** One of the advantages of using social networking sites or platforms is the enhancement of communication skills and digital literacy. When one engages in virtual communication there is an urge to sharpen up one's skill in the digital workplace.

In spite of the above mentioned benefits, there are also some potential challenges that needs to be addressed in the best possible way. Privacy issues is a major concern when it comes to online and social media platforms. This is because most of the time, fake accounts are created causing problem in connecting with the real account. In this age of information and communication technology people are bombarded with so much of information that at times they become overwhelmed leading to confusion in their minds. There is so much of misinformation and disinformation circulating the virtual space that it becomes necessary to distinguish between the right and the wrong. One wrong move can be disastrous in the long run. That is why it is necessary to maintain a balance between online and offline activities. Instructors must provide guidance on responsible social media usage and critical thinking skills to help students navigate the digital landscape effectively.

## **Theoretical framework**

In distance education, it becomes important for learners to construct and reinforce their identities as has been mentioned in the Social Identity Theory. In the midst of engaging with their peers on social media platforms, the learners need to identify themselves within a particular social group or cultures. The growth and development of social media has been a boon to the stakeholders, instructors and the learners associated with open universities and



distance education institutes. This form of media not only provides a gateway for the concerned learner to build networks , but it also helps to gain access to resources, knowledge, and opportunities that would otherwise not be available to them. Learners under open and distance learning are encouraged to explore and engage in communication through online mode. This would enable them to enhance knowledge and information and build an online community as has been mentioned in the *Social Capital Theory and Connected Learning Theory*. We as human beings tend to take in or identify with that behaviour that is more relatable to us. Sometimes, the messages that we see in online platforms influences our behaviour or our actions. When learners are exposed to media messages, they develop their attitudes, beliefs, and values . This fact has been mentioned in the *Cultivation Theory*. Different social media networks also provide a platform for public discourses and discussions. When people come together in an online space to discuss topics of mutual interest it leads to formation of publics. This is the main crux of the *Networked Publics Theory*. Different social media platforms not only enable one to get in touch with one another or explore online resources, it also helps in forming a networked community and other forms of interactions that were previously unseen. *The Affordance Theory* throws light on this very aspect. George Homan's *Social Exchange Theory* is another important theory worth discussing in this context. When someone interacts with others in the social sphere, they look into the benefits as against the risks involved, in order to decide whether to engage or not. Even on social networking sites, people tend to consume or share those contents based on likes, shares and comments.

### **Social media and its impact on online learning :**

A lot has changed in the past couple of years with more and more emphasis being given on online or e-learning. The modern world is an eyewitness to so many developments and innovations in every sphere of human life brought forward in order to make the world a better place for the people living in it. The rapid advancement of science and technology is like the

cherry on the top to render these developments in its most effective and useful way. Along with the three basic elements, education is one of the most essential requirements for men to excel in the ladder of civilization. Though getting education is not bound to be institutional only, we practice institutional education more as we admit ourselves to different schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions. The institutional education is a structured system providing knowledge to its pupils through a pattern, a determined syllabus and all of which can be divided into three models like:

- a. Traditional model where students attend the class and lecture delivered by the teacher.
- b. Distance model where teachers and students are not physically connected to each other. Learning is fulfilled through provided packaged learning materials, pre-recorded materials and interactions through different ways.
- c. Blended model where both the traditional and online solutions are blended in order to fulfill the teaching- learning process.

These days, with the rise in the use of technology based tools and platforms, learning is online based and is more focused on building a collaborative and networked community. Besides , there are other types of learning that are widely used in the teaching –learning process both in traditional conventional system and open and distance learning system. One important form of learning system is Cooperative Learning where small groups are created and classes are structured around the groups. The members of the group work together in such a way that each group members’ success is dependent on the group's success. As far as Competency-based learning is concerned , emphasis is given on predetermined "competencies," which focuses on outcomes and real-world performance. Of course, these days learning processes are adapted according to the needs and preferences of each individual. This enables the learner to be able to go deep into the meaning of the respective subjects. This entire process is carried out with

the help of computer algorithms and artificial intelligence. Another important method of learning that has caught up with most of the educationists is microlearning. In this type of learning, learners are provided with information in small fragments consisting of 3-5 minutes instead of just bombarding the learners with pages and pages of information. This might also demotivate the learners to pursue their education if they are being given huge amount of learning resources without comprehending it. So, microlearning is a better way to engage the learners in the learning process leading to better understanding of the subject matter. Personalized learning is also widely employed by most of the educational institutions in which the pace at which learning is provided and the instructional approach are optimized for the needs of each learner.

Learning through online sources is a kind of call of the time and the education system is utilizing it on different levels through the use of various ICT tools. These are certain tools and devices used in information and communication like computer, cell phones, television, radio, laptop, software, video conferencing etc. Education through these tools is imparted through both audio and visual modes. Educational networking, online learning and mobile learning are generally used in such a teaching-learning process. The post COVID-19 period has seen a rise in online learning social media platforms that are used widely to augment the teaching-learning process. Academic classes, conferences, seminars, workshops, symposiums etc. are held in online mode for the benefit of all.

Social media platforms have kind of provided a viable learning platform for the learners to pursue their various academic pursuits. They are a treasure house of knowledge and information and this comes in handy in case of online learning.

**Exploring the feasibility of a socially enriching learning environment in the field of ODL  
: KKHSOU perspective**

The ever increasing demand for education at all levels and the realization that education is a continuing life-long process made educationists and policy makers in the developed countries look for an alternative medium for imparting education to the learners. The growth and development of distance education was accelerated by the need to provide quality higher education to those who were unable to complete their respective academic programmes due to some problems. Over a period of time, newer technologies began to be used within the folds of ODL for accelerating the delivery of support services. Learners' support services are the main backbone of any distance educational system. Online and offline counselling , radio counselling, library facilities, laboratory facilities, provision of self-learning materials, provision of online learning resources etc. are some of the major support services that are provided to the learners under distance mode. We are all familiar with the terms- virtual learning, distributed learning, internet based learning, online learning and web-based learning. These forms of learning are the offshoot of the impact of ICT in the field of distance education. It not that only the distance educational system makes use of these different forms. Conventional and traditional modes of learning system have also started incorporating technology enabled learning system as a supplementary medium to the conventional face to face learning. Today, distance education is a vital component of the global educational landscape, continually adapting to meet the needs of learners worldwide. The establishment of the Open University in the UK in 1969 paved the way for the establishment of more open universities and distance educational institutions the world over. In India, the growth and development of the open and distance learning system can be credited to Delhi University for introducing correspondence courses as a pilot project during 1962. This was introduced on the basis of the report of the Expert Committee in March 1961. Thereafter, different colleges and universities started opening up departments and institutes for offering correspondence education. In the 1970s there was an expansion in the distance education scenario in the

country. The establishment of the Andhra Pradesh Open University in 1982 at Hyderabad (now known as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University) gave a push towards the setting up of more open universities in the country. At present there are 17 open universities in India in addition to more than 220 dual mode institutions. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University , that was established under the provision of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University Act' 2005 is a pioneering seat of learning in the entire north-eastern region of India. This is the first and the only state open university of the region with its motto being 'Education Beyond Barriers'. The University follows a blended learning approach for the benefit of the learners. Apart from counselling classes (both online and offline) , learners are also provided other support services like self-learning materials, recorded counselling classes that are uploaded on YouTube, video conferencing facility, library services, e-learning materials, online services etc.

The website of the University ([kkhsou.ac.in](http://kkhsou.ac.in)) serves as an important medium of dissemination of information to the learners and other stakeholders of the University. The website of the University has a plethora of features like information about the University (including governance), the different school of studies, research wing, learner's corner, information about the examination, study centres, links to digital library and eBidya, E-services and other important links.

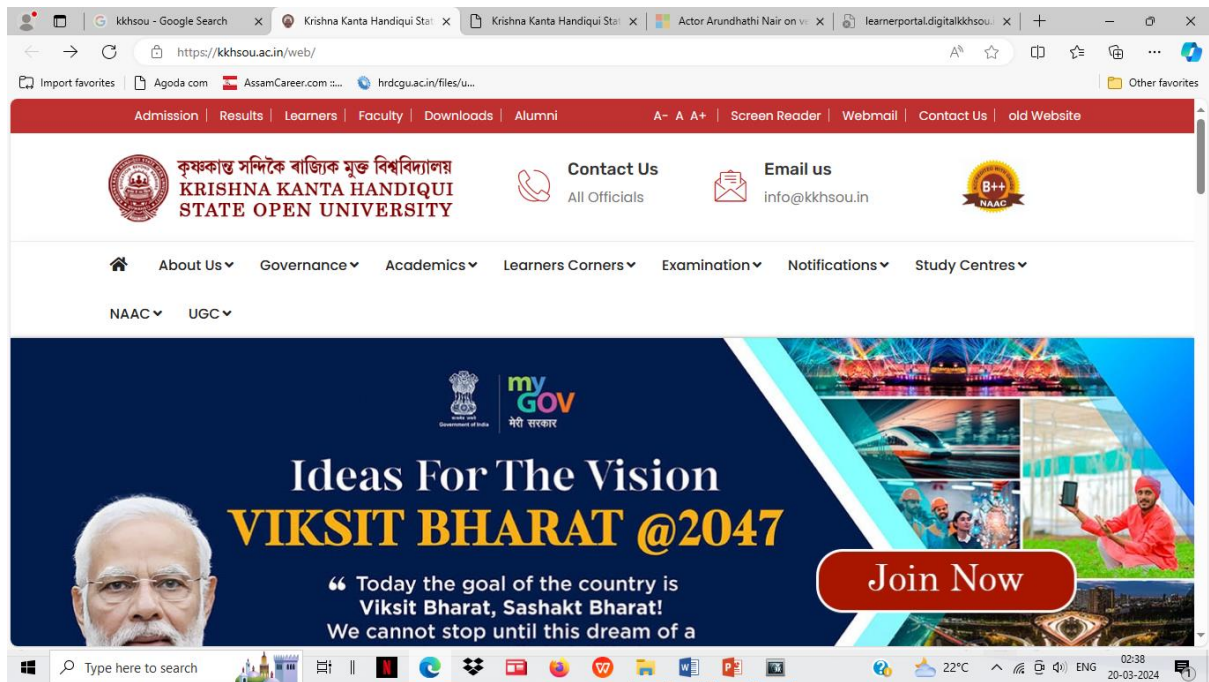


Fig – i : Website of the University

Source : <https://kkhsou.ac.in/web/>

The website of the University has some distinguishing features that have been provided below-

- i. **Online Admission :** The University has made arrangements for registration and admission to the different academic programmes which are done in online mode. This has drastically cut down on the hassles that one faces while going for offline admission. A screenshot of the online admission link has been provided in Fig-ii .
- ii. **Digital library :** The digital library of the university (as shown in Fig-ii) provides documents and other links like administrative documents, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA) Cell write-ups, proceedings of conference/seminar , academic publications, newsletters, annual reports, and other research related documents.
- iii. **Learner's corner :** The Learner's corner (as indicated in Fig-ii) provides information about dual degree, learner's zone (e-marksheets, e-admit cards, old question papers)

learner's portal, learner's handbook, admission data, feedback, career counselling and placement cell etc.

- iv. Examination : This particular section (as shown in Fig-ii) covers related data and information like Standard Operating Procedure, examination notice, link to e-marksheets, details of exam centre , old question papers etc.
- v. Study Centres : For the purpose of streamlining the selection of study centres by the learners , a list of the recognised study centres are provided in the website along with a handbook and email IDs of the different coordinators and Centre-in charge of the study centres.
- vi. Others : Grievance Redressal and Internal Complaint Committee platform, Learner feedback, Learners mentoring services, organizational chart of support services, link to KKHSOU Android App etc. (as shown in Fig-iii) can also be assessed.
- vii. KKHSOU RTI portal : Right to Information is important in every field of life more specifically in the field of distance education. Accessibility, accountability and transparency are three most important aspects of an ODL system. Learners must be able to access the learning materials and other related information for pursuing any academic programme. An educational institution is accountable to the learners and the society at large. As such, it must be transparent in its functioning. KKHSOU takes pride in the fact that it adheres to accessibility, accountability and transparency as its three basic cornerstones of growth. Even then, the University has provided an RTI portal (as highlighted in Fig-iii) for those who might be interested in accessing certain information as per their needs. This will create a more inclusive, equitable, and effective learning environment, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes and personal growth for students.

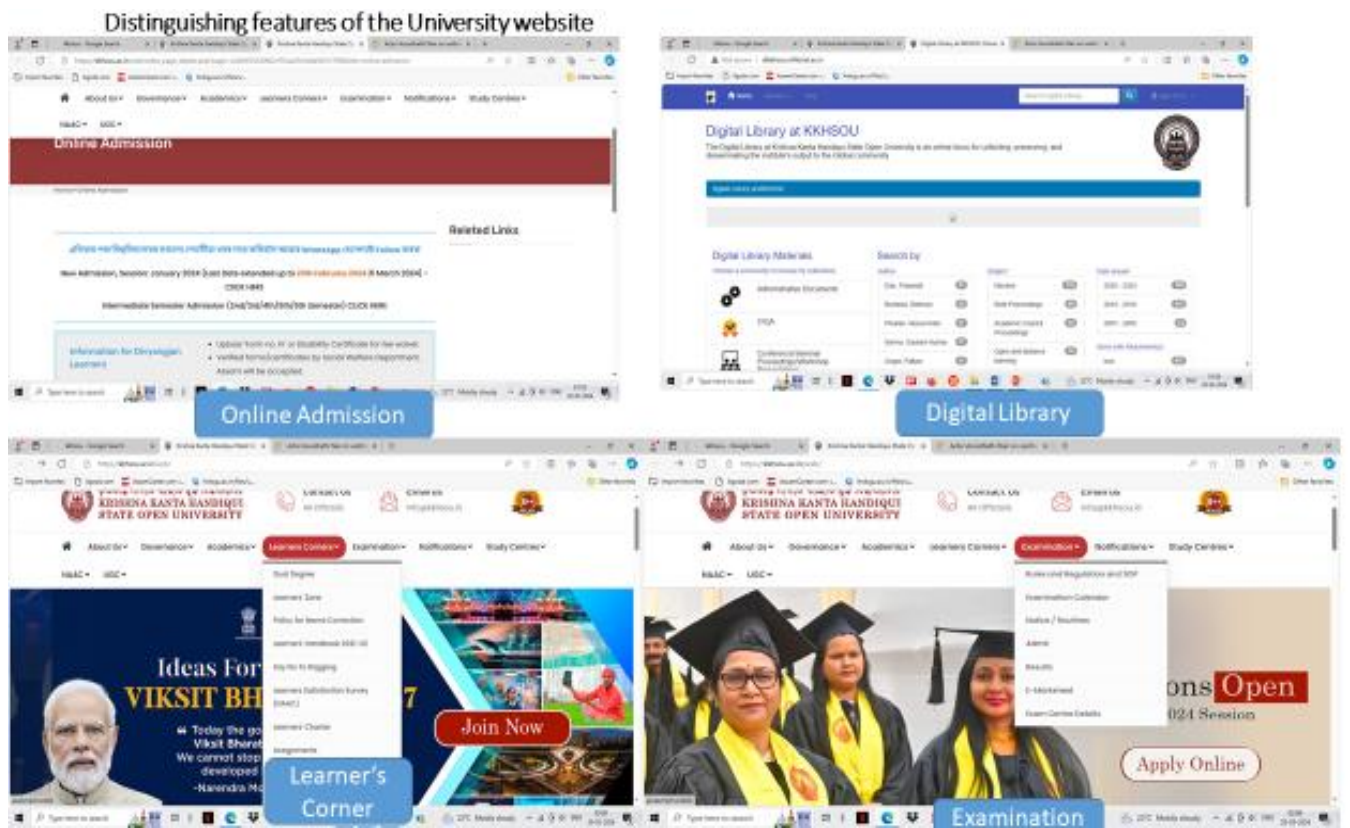


Fig – ii : Different features of the website of KKHSOU

Source : <https://kkhsou.ac.in/web/>



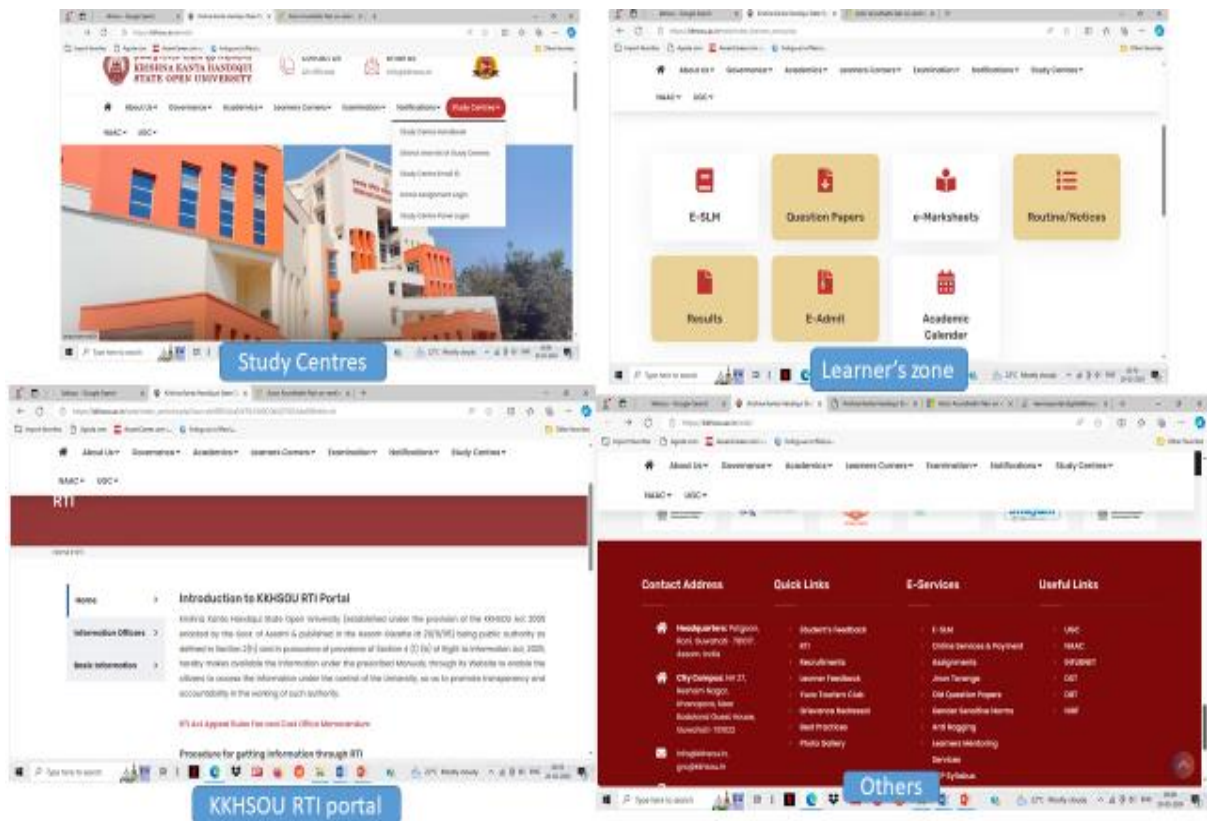
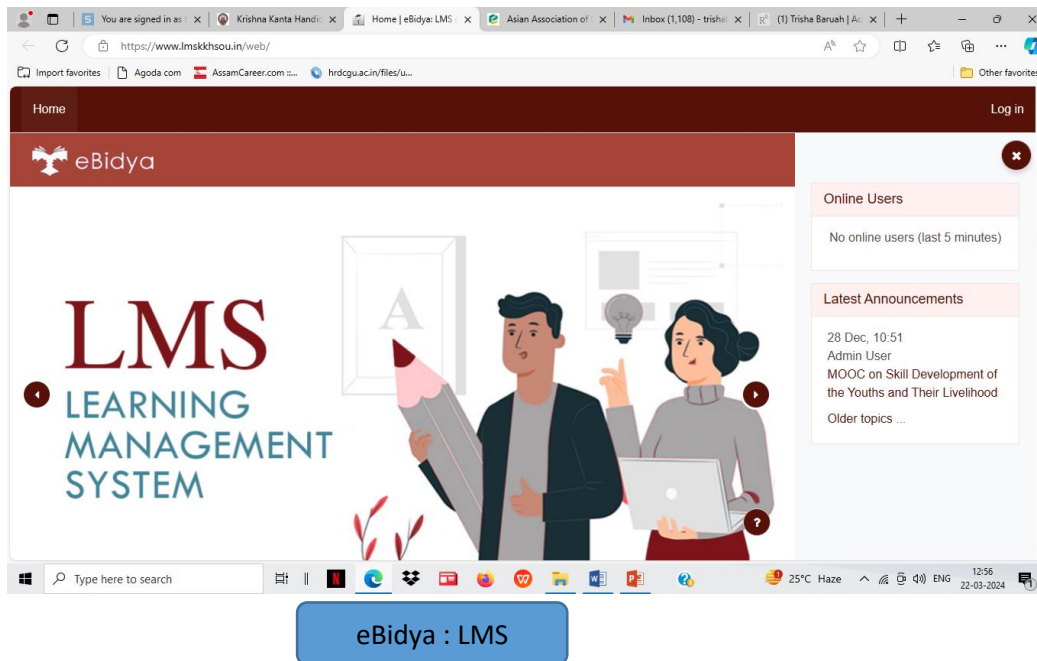


Fig – iii : Different features of the website of KKHSOU

Source : <https://kkhsou.ac.in/web/>

The website of the University serves as an important portal for the numerous learners across 327 study centres situated in different places of the State of Assam. University has two very important sub-portals through which a user can log in and get access to a variety of information – both academic and administrative. One is the eBidya which is the Learning Management System of the University and the other is the KKHSOU RTI portal.

eBidya is a one stop platform for accessing learning materials. Any upcoming important announcement can be made in the forums that have been specifically designed for the purpose. Apart from that, courses have also been uploaded in the LMS which also have other basic features like providing grades to the learners, activity reports, provision of question banks , content banks etc.



eBidya : LMS

Fig- iv : Learning Management System (eBidya) of KKHSOU

Source : <https://kkhsou.ac.in/web/>

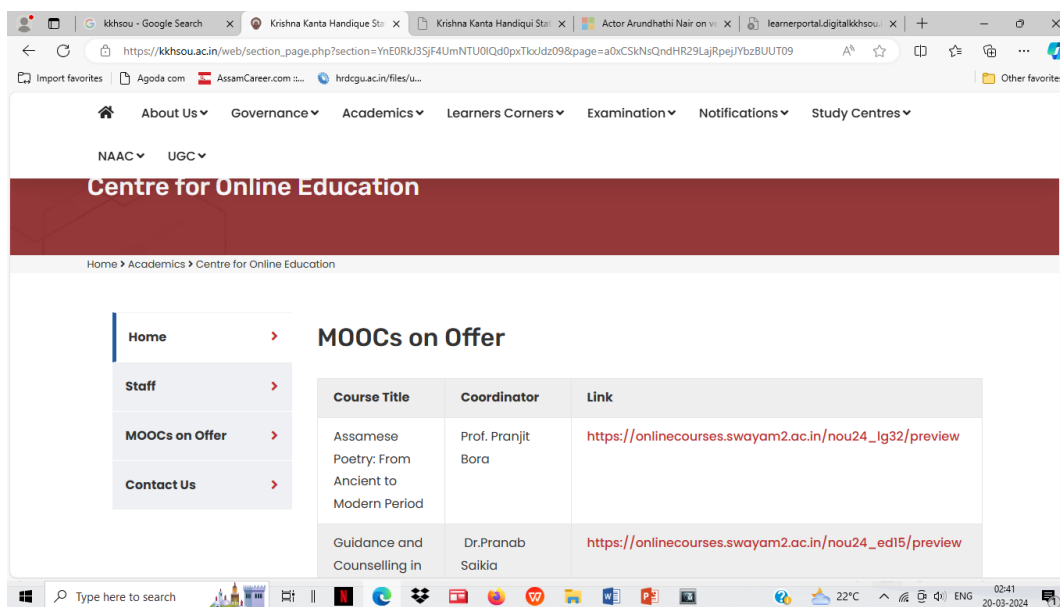


Fig – v : Web link of the Centre for Online Education

Source : <https://kkhsou.ac.in/web/>

The Center for Online Education (COE) has been established to look into the delivery of online resources and other information via the web. It also looks into the functioning of the online counselling classes and addresses any issues that might crop up while delivering the learning resources. The importance of online learning has been gaining grounds in recent years because it allows the learners to learn at their own pace.

The University has made its presence felt in the social sphere as well. One can follow the web pages in X (formerly known as Twitter @KKHSOU1 and Facebook (KKHSOU FB Official Group). Besides, different disciplines have their own WhatsApp mentoring groups whereby different course related queries are discussed apart from other examination matters.

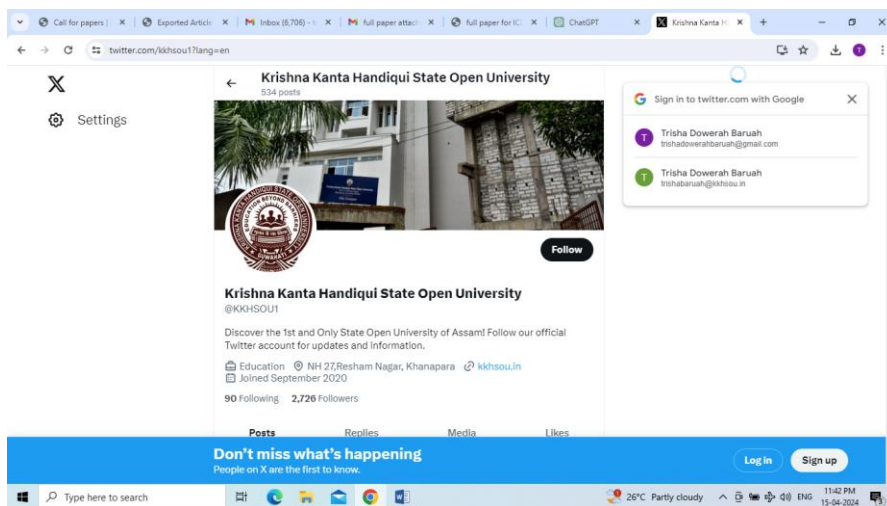


Fig- vi : Twitter handle of KKHSOU

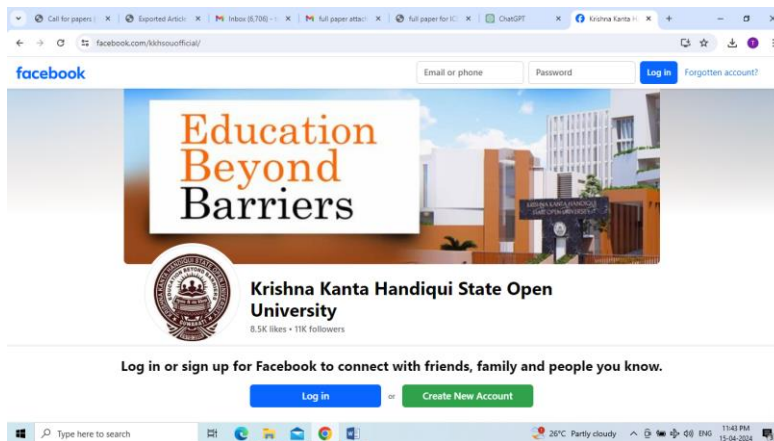


Fig – vii : University’s account in Facebook

This is definitely the age of online learning, virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, block chain technology, cloud computing and artificial intelligence. No doubt, such newer forms of technologies have had a massive impact on the delivery of learning resources and the mode of instructional delivery. However, one cannot deny the important role played by other conventional tools of learning like self-learning materials and offline counselling. The fact of the matter is that most of the educational institutions (conventional and distance educational institutions) resort to the blended learning approach in order to provide a host of options to the learners. This is because, most of the learners come from remote rural areas. As such, they might not be that efficient in handling the online learning tools. So, by providing a hybrid mode of learning or a blended system of learning, the learner will be able to have a better understanding of the subject matter and other related information. Having said that, a socially enriching learning environment goes a long way in enhancing learner engagement and retention since the problem of retention is a burning problem in most of the distance educational institutions or open universities.

## **Analysis and discussion:**

A careful analysis of the different facets of the online learning environment as provided by Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University will bring to light the fact that a lot of online tools and platforms are offered for the benefit of the learners and counsellors. Online admission has cut down the time taken to fill and deposit the form in person at the respective study centre. It has made the admission process hassle free. The digital library of the University is like a one-stop platform for accessing learning resources. eBooks, subscribed journals, newsletter, thesis, annual reports of the University etc. have all been uploaded and readily available to download for the benefit of the learners , counsellors, instructors and the administrators.

These days the thing that bothers most of the learners is getting a good placement after passing out from their respective academic programmes. The University has a placement cell of its own in which it provides relevant information to the learners regarding any placement opportunities. Learners can also access previous question papers, examination routines, e-marksheets, details of examination centres by clicking in the links provided under the examination section. This has not only lessened the burden and the anxiety on the learners but also on the administrative officials.

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University has its own distinct RTI portal where the procedure for procuring information through RTI has been highlighted . The aim of coming up with this portal was to provide transparency and accountability in the functioning of the University, improvement in governance and decision making, empowerment of stakeholders, facilitation of research and other academic pursuits, prevention of corruption and mismanagement and enhancement of public image and trust.

In order to enable the learners and other academicians to easily access and download online learning materials, a learning management system by the name of eBidya has been

conceptualised . A learner can log in to this LMS and access the different learning materials (e-resources, learning materials in both audio and audio-visual format) and other requisite academic related materials. Besides, the Centre for Online Education provides links to the delivery of online resources including MOOC courses. Social media have had a massive impact on the way learning is provided to the learners. These days most of the educational institutions have their respective web pages in various social media platforms wherein updated news is provided round the clock. KKHSOU also has its own web page in Facebook and twitter. Besides, the University has its own YouTube channel in which the various videos related to the course curriculum have been uploaded on the website. Thus, these different online features are a clear indication of the fact that the University has a socially enriching environment .

Creating a socially enriching learning environment in the field of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is not only feasible but also highly beneficial as has been highlighted in the following way-

**Establishing Virtual Learning Communities:** Virtual learning communities can be established through social media platforms, discussion forums, and online collaboration tools where learners can interact with peers, instructors, and experts. This fosters a sense of belongingness and encourages the learners to participate in the learning process.

**Collaborative Projects:** Collaborative projects can be designed that require students or learners to work together remotely. Social media channels can be utilised for communication, brainstorming, sharing resources, and providing feedback. This collaborative approach promotes teamwork, problem-solving skills, and creativity.

**Peer Support Networks:** Peer networks and groups encourage learners to seek help, share experiences, and exchange information related to academic matters. Social media platforms

provide a convenient space for students to connect with peers facing similar challenges, fostering a supportive learning community.

**Virtual Events and Workshops:** Virtual events, webinars, and workshops can be organised featuring guest speakers, industry experts, and alumni. These events can be promoted through social media channels to engage students and provide opportunities for networking, skill development, and career exploration.

**Creating Interactive Content:** Interactive learning materials can be created such as quizzes, polls, and discussions that are embedded within course content. Students can be encouraged to share their responses and engage in debates on social media platforms, thereby enhancing their understanding of the subject matter and promoting critical thinking.

**Social Learning Analytics:** Social learning analytics can be utilized to monitor student engagement, participation, and interactions within social media platforms. This data can be analysed to identify trends, assess learning outcomes, and provide personalized support to students who may be struggling.

**Digital Citizenship Education:** Digital citizenship education can be integrated into the curriculum to teach students about responsible and ethical use of social media.

**Accessibility and Inclusivity:** One must ensure that the socially enriched learning environment is accessible to all students, including those with disabilities or limited internet access. Alternative communication channels must be provided to accommodate diverse learning needs.

Thus, by leveraging social media and online collaboration tools, Open and Distance Learning institutions can create a vibrant and inclusive learning community that enhances student engagement, promotes collaborative learning, and prepares students for success in the digital age.

## **Conclusion:**

Thus, it is seen that having a viable platform for delivering learners' support services become all the more pertinent when addressing the needs and preferences of the learners under distance education. The problem of drop-out and retention is one of the burning problems in the field of ODL. Unlike conventional educational system, the learners under distance education are not in constant touch with their instructors. Thereby, they need certain kind of support services in addition to the counselling support. If such form of services are not provided to the learners at the right time, then there is every possibility of the learners dropping out from the academic programme leading to an increase in drop-out ratio. So, it takes a lot of effort on the part of the institution to provide a technologically viable and socially enriching environment for lifelong learning. Interactive instructional technology can help in keeping the learners motivated and interested. In other words, such form of learning environment helps in providing access to information, encourage learner engagement, provide opportunities for learning and accommodate different learning styles. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University has been at the forefront of blending different tools and technologies for providing blended learning system. The University's Learning Management System provides information related to different courses along with videos and audio based lectures. The University has made its presence felt in the social media platforms like Facebook and twitter (now known as X) sharing any information that might be of importance to the learners. Online counselling and offline counselling sessions have gained importance along with the self-learning materials that are provided at the time of admission to the learners. The website of the University has certain features in it which makes it very much user-friendly. Certain links have been provided which redirects the learner to the examination page, the learner's portal, the RTI portal, the library



page etc. Along with these features, the different social media platforms provide an opportunity for the learners to connect and build networked community for better understanding and exchange of information. So, there is wide scope in the use of social learning platform for the benefit of the learners more specifically in the field of Open and Distance Learning.

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