

# COVID-19 Lockdown: Turning Isolated Educational Disguise Into Online Blessing

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## ABSTRACT

“Blessing in Disguise”, an old saying has been proved true during the current covid-19 pandemic lockdown. It has been able to get best out of human intelligentsia, who have put in their best efforts to keep humanity going in such tough times. Educational sector being no exception has been tremendously benefitted by the technological advances that have been put to their best use, perhaps for the first time since their introduction into the technological world. People in academics seemed to be technophobic and were therefore unable to use technology to their advantage. As soon as covid-19 lockdown was announced worldwide, academics were forced to look for alternatives to traditional teaching/learning, and fortunately technology provided the solution. Thus, as we see, there was a surge in the use of cloud based collaborative video conferencing tools. As the race started, it even became difficult for teachers and students to choose a particular tool as there were many of them available in the market. Every tool available has its own strengths and weaknesses. In this study an attempt has been made to see the usage growth of these tools and also provide a comparative statistics cum study of their pros & cons.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Video conferencing, Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex

## INTRODUCTION:

The COVID-19 has enabled human resource in and out of businesses to get creative when it comes to how communication occurs with colleagues, customers and partners. ICT age that we live in provides us innumerable ways to stay connected with all these stakeholders through A/V conferencing [5]. With so many choices for A/V meeting tools available, it's important to look

into the differences and similarities between them, their pros and cons and their popularity among the people especially academicians. In this paper, an attempt has been made to show how covid-19 lockdown proved to be a blessing in disguise in terms of the usage of online teaching learning A/V tools. For this purpose a varied set of video conferencing tools was used and often it was difficult for teachers/learners to decide which tool to use. A further attempt has been made here to make a comparative study between some most popular Cloud-based online video conferencing tools: Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet. We will look at their functionalities and limitations to see which one suit video conferencing needs of the teaching/learning community or businesses [14].

While choosing a video conferencing tool, the user should first try to find answers to the following questions, so that a better choice can be made select the most appropriate tool that will suit the needs of the user and his/her organization [13].

- Will the tool be used for one-to-one online meeting?
- Will it be used to offer virtual office hours?
- Will it be used to run a training session for a group or a class?
- Will it be used to any participants or assign them to specific rooms?
- Will it be used to record a meeting in the cloud for later watching by attendees?
- Will it be used to hold a meeting where confidential data will be shared?
- Will it be used to organize a meeting with external participants?
- Will it be used to live stream a video conference?
- Will it be used to organize a meeting with more than 100 participants?

Answers to these questions will decide which tool a user or company/institution needs to run its video conferencing affairs smoothly. The tools chosen here for this study have all the functionalities a user/business need for communicating with coworkers/employees through video conferencing, but are still different from each other.

### Usage Statistics & Growth:

Video conferencing software's have seen exponential demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March alone, video conferencing applications recorded 62 million downloads. The growth is attributed to increasing adoption of platforms like Google Meet, Microsoft Teams,

Webex and Zoom as businesses switched to “Work from Home” mode to limit the spread of corona virus. Globally, Zoom was found to be the most downloaded video conferencing application in February and March and it continues to be the highest downloading application across the World [8][9]. Videoconferencing software company Zoom has been one of the biggest winners from the Corona pandemic crisis. Its stocks are up by about 67% so far this year. Google Meet has been adding 3 million users daily since lockdown was announced [12]. Google Meet's daily usage has gone up 30 times since January this year and is hosting 3 billion minutes of video meetings [7].

Microsoft is not lagging, it too has seen a 500% increase in Teams meetings, calls and conferences in China alone since January 31. WebEx, one of the oldest video-conferencing apps, recently made its services free of cost, helping people work from home amidst covid-19 pandemic and in just one day WebEx saw 240,000 new subscriptions. Webex reported 5.5 billion meeting minutes in the first week of March, while having around 3.2 million meetings in a day, which is unbelievable. Webex registered a record 324 million attendees by the end of March and about 73 million meetings took place in the same period. Also people spent around 5.5 billion meeting minutes on Webex in the first eleven business days of March.

**Table-1 lists the download statistics of these tools before the onset of covid-19 and the current statistics from Google play store [11].**

S. No	Name of the App/Tool	Dec 2019 Downloads	June 2020 Downloads
01.	Zoom	13M+	100M+
02.	Google Meet	2M+	50M+
03.	Microsoft Teams	20M+	50M+
04.	Cisco Webex	n.a	10M+

**Table-1 Play Store downloads statistics\***

### Technical Comparison:

These tools differ on many varied characteristics ranging from capabilities to collaborate and pricing plans. Let's take a deeper look into the specific functionalities of each of these applications.

In response to the covid-19 crisis [10], Google temporarily opened up Enterprise functionalities of Google Meet to all G Suite customers. Google Meet has been specifically designed with business needs in mind. It has a simple user friendly interface that can manage up to 250 people

in an online video conferencing meeting, depending on the G Suite subscription type obtained. The user friendly interface, fully integrated with other G Suite applications like Google Calendar allows people to join in and logout of meetings quickly, just by clicking a link [6]. Currently being one of the frequently and most widely used video conferencing, Zoom is easy to use and has good audio and video quality. Zoom although having many useful meeting functionalities, is facing some security issues as its usage increased in the past few weeks, resulting in invention of a new word, "Zoom-bombing", referring to the security risk of hackers intruding into any Zoom meeting. This issue is certainly something important to take into account while deciding to buy a reliable and viable video conferencing tool.

Microsoft Teams, part of Microsoft Office 365 is a video conference solution with several service plans, both free and paid. Both the plans allow users to host meetings with up to 250 attendees. Cisco webex, a competing app in the market holds ground and also provides features comparable with those of Zoom, Google Meet and MS Teams.

**Table-2 gives a summarized view of all the video conferencing apps discussed in the previous section. A holistic view of almost all the required features in a videoconferencing tool needed for business or academic communications has been presented.**

Criteria	Zoom [1]	Google Meet [3]	MS Teams [4]	Cisco Webex [2]
<b>Participants</b>	Basic: 100 Large meeting add ons: 500	Basic 100; Business 150; Enterprise 250	Maximum for all plans: 250	Video endpoints: 200; Users in a single meeting: 500
<b>Waiting room</b>	Available	Available	Available	Available
<b>Time limit</b>	Basic:40 minutes Pro & up: No limit	No limit	No limit	No limit
<b>File sharing</b>	Available	Available	Available	Available
<b>Grid view</b>	Gallery view with thumbnail	Grid with the main speaker highlighted	No Grid view	Grid view
<b>Dial-ins</b>	Calling using a phone line is expensive but easy	Dial into video meeting from a phone	Audio conferencing feature available	Video call back from desktop client
<b>Collaboration</b>	Cloud platform for A/V	Integration with other Google	Cloud based collaboration	Cloud based recording of

	conferencing, collaboration, chat and webinars	apps, Bundled with a lot of other services.	software, fully integrated with Office 365.	video, chat and polling
<b>Screen sharing</b>	Host can allow multiple people to share screen at the same time	Only one person can share screen	Desktop sharing screen sharing including an app or a file.	Integrated audio and presentation sharing
<b>Video Recording/ sharing</b>	Record meetings on local computer	Capture audio, video, chat and screen sharing activity, saved to Google Drive	Record meetings and group calls. The recording is saved to MS Stream.	Cloud based or Network based recording (NBR)
<b>Voice calling</b>	Available	Available	Available	Available
<b>Security</b>	End-to-end encryption	Encryption “in transit”, between sender and Google server	Encryption “in transit	End-to-end encryption
<b>Business Plan</b>	Limited to virtual calling	More diversified	More diversified	More diversified
<b>Virtual Background</b>	Available	Available	Available	Available
<b>Add on tools</b>	Includes an annotation tool, use GIFs and conduct polls.	Includes Intelligent Muting, use of emojis and GIFs	private channels, email from Outlook, polls, add SharePoint enterprise search	Works well with Github, Office 365, Google Drive etc
<b>Captions</b>	Manual caption, host can type while talking	Speech-to-text technology that shows captions live in meetings	Live captions can be enabled	Live captions can be enabled
<b>Integrations</b>	Facebook, Skype Workplace, Salesforce, Outlook, Google Drive &	Skype and other video meeting systems	Integrates with innumerable apps	Salesforce, GitHub, Google Drive etc

	Calendar			
<b>Application Type</b>	Standalone	Part of G suite	Part of Office 365	Standalone
<b>Pricing plans</b>	Basic plan is free for 100 participants; Pro: 100 to 300 participants costing \$14.99/month. Business plan costs \$19.99/month with 300 participants Enterprise plan for \$19.99/month with a minimum of 50 hosts for 500 participants and unlimited Cloud Storage.	Basic plan starts at \$6/user/ month for up to 100 people. Business plan costs \$12/user/month with 150 people and \$25/user/month for Enterprise subscription with 250 participants with unlimited cloud storage.	There is a free version, paid versions cost \$5.00 or \$12.50 per month per user.	Basic free plan; small and mid-size teams are cheaper at \$13.50/month/host and \$17.95/month/host respectively.
<b>Usage</b>	<a href="#">7 million GB/day.</a> Or 210,000 TB/month		Hosting 4.1 billion meeting minutes/ day	200 million video conferences a month
<b>Growth</b>	December 2019: 10 million active users, March 2020: 200 million users June 2020: 300 million users	Adding 3 million users daily, daily usage spiked by 30x since January, hosting 3 billion minutes of video meetings	May 2020: 44 million users June: 75 million active users, over 200 million daily participants	Had over 240,000 sign-ups in just 24 hours

**Table-2 Comparative summarization of important features of select videoconferencing apps**

## CONCLUSION:

Almost every video conferencing platform in the market has seen an exponential spike in the number of users, and the load that it is dealing with since lockdown was first announced. After doing an in depth analysis of the features and usage characteristics of top and leading videoconferencing apps, it was found that they approximately have the same features and tools available to make video conferencing work for any business. These collaborative and video conferencing tools are very convenient and easy to use for those working from home or in the office. It can further be noted that there are pros and cons with each app.

Google Meet and Microsoft Teams are really good for those who actually want to collaborate in real-time, because they are fully integrated with G Suite and Office 365 respectively. However, it is crystal clear that there's no obvious winner in the competition for the ideal video conferencing tool. The final decision largely depends on business needs and requirements of an individual or organization.

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*Research paper*

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