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MOOC - A model of educational delivery

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Abstract

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have recently received a great deal of attention from the media, entrepreneurial vendors, education professionals and technologically literate sections of the public. The promise of MOOCs is that they will provide free to access, cutting edge courses that could drive down the cost of university-level education and potentially disrupt the existing models of higher education (HE). This has encouraged elite universities to put their courses online by setting up open learning platforms, such as edX. New commercial start-ups such as Coursera and Udacity have also been launched in collaboration with prestigious universities, offering online courses for free or charging a small fee for certification that is not part of credit for awards.

Keywords: MOOC, educational delivery

Introduction

“Technology can become the 'wings' that will allow the educational world to fly farther and faster than ever before; if we will allow it.”

- Jenny Arledge

Distance education or long-distance learning is the education of students who may not always be physically present at an educational institute. Traditionally, this usually involved correspondence courses wherein the student corresponded with the school via post. Today it involves online education. Courses that are conducted (51 percent or more) are either hybrid, blended or 100% distance learning. Massive open online courses (MOOCs), offering large-scale interactive participation and open access through the World Wide Web or other network technologies, are recent developments in distance education. A number of other terms (distributed learning, e-learning, online learning, virtual classroom etc.) are used roughly synonymously with distance education.

MOOC

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are a recent expansion in higher education that experienced rapid development and achieved substantial attention from a broad range of learners. A massive open online course is an online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web.

Massive-there is no limit on attendance;

Open-free of charge and accessible to anyone with internet connection;

Online-delivered via the internet; and

Courses-structured around a set of goals in a specific area of study

A MOOC is a model of educational delivery that is, to varying degrees, massive, open, online, and a course. Most MOOCs are structured similar to traditional online higher education courses in which students watch lectures, read assigned material, participate in online discussions and forums, and complete quizzes and tests on the course material. The

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online activities can be augmented by local meet-ups among students who live near one another. MOOCs are typically provided by higher education institutions, often in partnership with “organizers” such as Coursera, edX, and Udacity, though some MOOCs are being offered directly by a college or university. MOOCs arise from the confluence of several important trends, and they raise important questions and spark essential conversations about curriculum design, accreditation, what constitutes a valid learning experience, and who has access to higher education.

The courses consist of pre-recorded video lectures, computer graded tests and discussion forums to review course materials or to get help. MOOCs offer high quality education from worlds’ top universities, usually for free. These universities offer their courses through major providers of MOOCs viz. Coursera, edX, Udacity and Udemy. In India, IITs, IIMs and several top notch private universities have already offering courses using Coursera and edX to their students. MOOCs are a recent and widely researched development in distance education, first introduced in 2006 and emerged as a popular mode of learning in 2012. Before the Digital Age, distance learning appeared in the form of correspondence courses in the 1890s–1920s and later radio and television broadcast of courses and early forms of e-learning. Typically fewer than five percent of the students would complete a course. The 2000s saw changes in online, or e-learning and distance education, with increasing online presence, open learning opportunities, and the development of MOOCs.

Benefits of MOOCs

Following are some benefits of MOOCs

1. **Motivations for MOOC providers:** The scale and open nature of MOOCs provides opportunities for expanding access to higher education to all and creates a space for experimentation with online teaching and learning. This exploration of new approaches for Higher Education provision has generated significant interest from governments, institutions and commercial organizations.
2. **Motivations for learners:** Learners’ motivation to participate in MOOCs is a significant area of interest to many higher education stakeholders. There are many factors that influence students’ motivation to learn; these include future economic benefit, development of personal and professional identity, challenge and achievement, enjoyment and fun. What motivates the MOOC learner? First, To support lifelong learning or gain an understanding of the subject matter, with no particular expectations for completion or achievement, Secondly For fun, entertainment, social experience and intellectual stimulation, Thirdly, Convenience, often in conjunction with barriers to traditional education options, Fourthly, To experience or explore online education.
3. **Business models:** The most common revenue stream for the major new MOOC providers is to charge fees for certificates. Whilst edX is a not for-profit MOOC platform with the goal of helping universities achieve shared educational missions, in the longer term it will also need to be self-sustaining. Coursera and UDACITY are examples of for-profit organizations,

they are working on developing a variety of business models, and according to their published commercial strategies, these include: selling student information to potential employers or advertisers; fee-based assignment grading; access to the social networks and discussions; advertising for sponsored courses; and tuition fees for credited courses.

4. **Improving access to higher education:** MOOCs are regarded by many as an important tool to widen access to higher education for millions of people, including those in the developing world, and ultimately enhance their quality of life. MOOCs may be regarded as contributing to the democratisation of HE, not only locally or regionally but globally as well. MOOCs can help democratise content and make knowledge reachable for everyone. Students are able to access complete courses offered by universities all over the world, something previously unattainable. With the availability of affordable technologies, MOOCs increase access to an extraordinary number of courses offered by world-renowned institutions and teachers.
5. **Providing an affordable alternative to Formal Education:** The costs of tertiary education continue to increase because institutions tend to bundle too many services. With MOOCs, some of these services can be transferred to other suitable players in the public or private sector. MOOCs are for large numbers of participants, can be accessed by anyone anywhere as long as they have an Internet connection, are open to everyone without entry qualifications and offer a full/complete course experience online for free.
6. **Sustainable Development Goals:** MOOCs can be seen as a form of open education offered for free through online platforms. The (initial) philosophy of MOOCs is to open up quality Higher Education to a wider audience. As such, MOOCs are an important tool to achieve Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
7. **Offers a flexible learning schedule:** Certain lectures, videos, and tests through MOOCs can be accessed at any time compared to scheduled class times. By allowing learners to complete their coursework in their own time, this provides flexibility to learners based on their own personal schedule. MOOCs promise to offer flexibility, affordable access and fast-track completion at a low cost for whoever is interested in learning
8. **Online collaboration:** The learning environments of MOOCs make it easier for learners across the globe to work together on common goals. Instead of having to physically meet one another, online collaboration creates partnerships among learners. While time zones may have an effect on the hours that learners communicate, projects, assignments, and more can be completed to incorporate the skills and resources that different learners offer no matter where they are located.

Challenges and Issues in MOOCs

There are many benefits can be seen of MOOCs but it also have to deal with many challenges and issues as listed below.

1. It is relying on user-generated content that can create a chaotic learning environment among the learners.
2. It demands Digital literacy to make use of the online materials but it an ordinary learner cannot get benefit from it.
3. It requires a great deal of time and effort from participants that may not possible for those learners who are working.
4. The issue of quality assurance of MOOCs is a big concern for Higher Education. In most cases, compared to other online courses, MOOCs lack structure, and rarely include the central role of the instructor or teacher.
5. They are largely self-directed learning, which is a very different experience to formal education. The open nature of MOOCs creates a population that is self-selected to be engaged and passionate about this approach to learning.
6. Once the course is released, content will be reshaped and reinterpreted by the massive student body, making the course trajectory difficult for instructors to control.
7. Language and translation barriers could be found in its usage.
8. Some concerns are expressed around cheating and plagiarism with online learning, particularly where courses are eligible for academic credits.
9. They do not provide a social learning experience or one of being dealt with personally.
10. It is not entirely clear how the MOOC approach to online education will make money. Most MOOC start-ups do not appear to have clear business models and are following the common approach of Silicon Valley start-ups by building fast and worrying about revenue streams later.

Conclusion

MOOCs promise to open up higher education by providing accessible, flexible, affordable and fast-track completion of universities courses for free or at a low cost for learners who are interested in learning. The popularity of MOOCs has attracted a great deal of attention from higher education institutions and private investors around the world seeking to build their brands and to enter the education market. Institutions will need to look more closely at and learn from the different initiatives outside traditional institutions that are developing new business, financial and revenue models to meet the different needs of new groups of learners in an open higher education marketplace. Open education brings new opportunities for innovation in higher education that will allow institutions and academics to explore new online learning models and innovative practices in teaching and learning. At a national and international level, new frameworks for higher education funding structures, quality insurance and accreditation to support different approaches and models for delivering higher education will be required. Thus, the policy makers will need to embrace openness and make education more affordable and accessible for all and at the same time be profitable for the institutions in an open higher education ecosystem.

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