Chapter 96
Arguments Against Online Learning

Dan Patroc
University of Oradea, Romania

ABSTRACT

This chapter details some arguments against online learning both from the literature dealing with such problems and from the personal experience of the author. There are eight arguments rendered in detail, as well as some other arguments briefly mentioned. Even if the order of the arguments is random, they all point in the same direction: that online learning should be accepted with much caution. In spite of these arguments (and although most of them should really create some doubts for the defenders of online learning), in the end we must admit that such a choice (teaching or being a student in an online environment) is a purely personal one.

INTRODUCTION

The American journal, *Electronics*, published, on the 19th of April 1965 (vol. 38, no. 8), a short article under the title of *Cramming more Components onto Integrated Circuits*, written by Gordon E. Moore, at the time the director of research and development at Fairchild Semiconductor (probably the leader of the semi-conductor market in the US in the 1960's), and later co-founder of industry giant Intel. The main idea of Moore's editorial, and what later became known as Moore's Law, was that in the next 10 years (until 1975, that is), it would be possible to place as many as 65,000 components on a single quarter-inch semiconductor which roughly meant an increase at a rate of a factor of two per year (in 1965, the average number of transistors on a circuit was around 2,000). Or, put in simpler terms, Moore's law is a prediction which states that the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles approximately every two years. Obviously, since this is not a law of nature or physics, Moore's prediction is not valid for eternity and without limits, a fact which Moore himself agreed with right from the start. But, strangely or not, this law has been validated over and over again in the last 50 years (Mody, 2016) and not only for the narrow matter of computer processors per se, but for all IT related issues (e.g., RAMs, hard-disks, monitors, printers, digital cameras and even mobile phones). We could "translate" Moore's Law in simpler

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and broader terms by saying that it (the law) states the implacability of technological progress in the IT industry, by drastically improving performance while, equally, reducing the price of digital hardware. Of course, there are critics of this "law" who say either that the geometrical progress is a questionable fact, or that the existence of the law itself is actually dictating the rhythm of the technological progress by being generally accepted in the field and, therefore, imposing some sort of standard on the industry, like a self-fulfilling prophecy (Seel, 2012, p. 16). Nonetheless, experts in computer technology tend to accept Moore's prediction as a hardcore rule for this area of human evolution. Brian Krzanich, acting CEO of Intel, stated, in 2017, that "Moore's Law is alive and well and flourishing" (para. #9), with some revisions (the cadence of doubling the performance is closer now to two years and a half, as opposed to the 18 months indicated in the 1970's).

The other major phenomenon worth mentioning here is the rise of the internet in the beginning of the 21st century to the state of being the dominant and the universal way of communication of today. Although restricted to military use in its beginnings, in the 1960's, and then used mainly by academia in the 80's, the internet came to literally conquer the world in the late 90's and the first years of the new millennium by offering not only vast amounts of information, but also facilities never seen before in the history of mankind such as instant communication worldwide, shopping without any kind of geographical restriction, borderless cooperation between more or less skilled people in different fields of expertise, and, maybe most of all, social connection and limitless entertainment (Weber, 2003). The progress and influence of the internet has been measured in countless ways, all of them valid in some perspective and, so, we shall not mention them here since it is not our main point to make and, on the other hand, we feel that it is a truism and a common-sense observation to say that that the internet is the dominant technological feature of our day. Let us only note that according to Hilbert and Lopez (2011) if in 1993 the Internet carried 1% of the information going through 2-way channels of communication, by 2000 this amount increased to 51%, while in 2007 more than 97% of telecommunicated information was carried through the internet. The Miniwatts Marketing Group (2017) estimates through its internetworldstats.com site that in March 2017 there were approximately 3.8 billion users of the internet worldwide (roughly half of the entire world population). Also, their data and graphs show us the degree to which the internet has penetrated the world by the first semester of 2017. Figure 1 gives more information about penetration rates of the internet. As an evolution of computers and internet, let us mention that the usage of mobile phones, a key feature for distance education in the last 2-3 years (and extremely important for the future), saw a drastic increase in the last years, covering more than half of the world population, according to the data presented by (Statista, 2017). Figure 2 displays more information about mobile phone penetration rates.

When we combine the data mentioned above with some empirical observation concerning people around us, we can state with certainty that, unless some unfortunate cataclysm occurs, the future will witness an undisputed and quasi-total dominance of computer (smartphones are included here) and internet communication and human presence. In other words, this is not just some passing fashion but a dramatic change of what it means to be human, of what society and living together mean. Although somewhat similar to the printing revolution of Gutenberg, Luther's Reform, or the Industrial Revolution, this digital revolution of the 21st century seems to be happening incomparably faster (and at a larger scale) than any other technological or social revolution in history (Merritt, 2016). As a result of the speed of this process, a subjective opinion that might arise is that the criticism against some features of the digital revolution looks softer than the criticism against more ancient revolutions.