Chapter 44
MOOCs Learners:
Self–Motivation and Success in Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have brought online learning movement to the forefront of educational research, but one of the major critiques of this learning platform is the very low completion rate. This chapter not only highlights the factors that influence low completion but also interprets how incompletion can fulfill goals of enrollment. Self-motivation is identified as a key factor for success in online learning platforms. This chapter puts together a review of existing research on MOOC enrollment and completion and also explains how success can be defined in a broader way in online learning. Along with that it draws on examples of success through incompletion in MOOCs from a qualitative study on female MOOC users from South Asia. Findings suggest that users enroll into MOOCs with goals to complete but also with specific needs to fulfill. An in-depth analysis of the interviews highlights how women have utilized this platform for their personal, professional or academic development and self-improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has brought online learning movement to the forefront of educational research but one of the major critiques of this learning platform is the very low completion rate (Breslow, Pritchard, DeBoer, Stump, Ho, & Seaton, 2013; Ho et al., 2014; Koller, Ng, Chuong, & Zhengao, 2013; Kolowich, 2013). Although completion is often defined as advancing in a course, fulfilling all requirements and acquiring an official certification or recognition, this definition is not encompassing enough to incorporate the diverse learner populations' initial enrollment reasoning. Moreover, it is questionable to assume that completion in the traditional definition was even part of the ulterior

goal of enrollment. Moreover, online or digital learners are also very different from our preconceived notion of learners in a classroom. Digital learners have been broadly categorized as digital natives and digital immigrants. Digital natives are people who were born into and grew up in an environment where technology and Internet has been an integral part of everyday existence (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Prensky, 2001). Digital immigrants are they who were not born into a technology-infused environment, but over time became more active users of technology and Internet. When analyzing online learners on platforms like MOOCs, it is difficult to separate the two population by age group because the age range of learners is very wide and all learners likely have some technology and Internet skills to be able to enroll and continue with MOOCs. In general, online learners can all be identified as digital learners who share similar characteristics like appreciation for technology-infused learning environment, flexibility of schedule, and the liberty to learn from one's own preferred location.

This chapter not only critically analyzes the factors that influence digital learners low completion in general but also interprets how goals of enrollment are fulfilled and success is achieved even without formal completion certification. Self-motivation is identified as a key factor in success in online learning platforms and that is often supported by multiple self-selective needs and goals for enrolling in an online course. A brief discussion on self-directed and motivated learning and success in online learning is further explained with examples of success among learners on MOOC platforms. These examples are extracted from in-depth, open-ended multiple interviews with 4 women from India and Pakistan.

The four women were purposively selected based on their intent to enroll into MOOCs to complete or explore a course platform, reading materials, and the course structure and format. Along with that, they took multiple courses on Coursera[1] and defined completion on the basis of need fulfillment rather than completing and passing all course requirements. This platform has given these women opportunity to build skills and use that towards finding a job in their field of interest or fulfill a specific predefined goal that was set prior to enrolling. Although completion is specifically defined by completing all course requirements and receiving a certificate, it can be defined in other ways based on what is the primary goal for taking a course. If the goal of enrollment is achieved, not receiving a certificate or not completing all course activities and requirements is no longer a factor of defining completion as the motivational factor is fulfilled prior to the official completion of a course. The interview findings highlights the internal and external factors that motivate women to take online courses and how far the learners have achieved fulfillment from the learning experience.

Online Learning and MOOCs: Concise Review

Who are MOOC users?

Massive enrollment in MOOCs has drawn the interest of researchers ever since one of its first courses named "Introduction to Artificial Intelligence" offered by Stanford University faculty Professor Sebastian Thrun in the fall of 2011 had 160,000 students from 190 countries. As the number of courses increased, enrollment numbers have decreased per course but this does not imply any decline of interest for MOOCs. 2015 was a very significant year in the MOOCs movement. Student enrollment doubled and more people signed up in 2015 than its previous 3 years. According to Class Central (Shah, 2015), more than 35 million enrolled into at least one course in 2015 up from 17 million in 2014. Edsurge (an educational technology company) in 2015 claimed that Udacity, Coursera and edX have more than 24 million students. According to edX's twitter account[2] it has reached its 5 million students mark in

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