Participants and non-participants in open online courses

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Introduction

• The topic of this talk is our study of patterns of participation in an experimental MOOC (pilot project)
• Research focus is to better understand the motivation of participants:
  – Why do they go for a MOOC?
  – What are their expectations beforehand - and their experiences afterwards?
  – What keeps participants engaged and active - and what causes participants to never start or to drop out before completion?
• Work in progress – the pilot project is ongoing as well as data collection
Context for this study

Project initiated by the Danish University Colleges (policy-making body for the University College sector in Denmark)
Pilot project aiming to do:
• Explore options for establishing a nationwide partnership for the production and delivery of MOOCs in Denmark
• Design, develop and test a new format in further education aimed at teachers and early childhood professionals (MOOC)
• Two iterations of the MOOC will run in 2017 (early spring – re-design – late autumn)
The MOOC

• Free, open online course – a certificate is offered for those who complete the course, but no formal credits (no exams)
• The topic is ”Open school” (integration of the outside world into the school subjects and teaching)
• Target group is teaching professionals in primary and secondary school; NGOs; museums etc.
• The course is made of from 6 modules, 3 common ones and 3 electives covering separate sectors (culture, industry, volunteer work)
• Runs for 10 weeks, in which full participants will complete 4 modules with assignments
• Materials are texts, videos and websites
• Activity is lightly moderated by different tutors in each module
• App. 80 participants in first iteration (app. 130 in the ongoing iteration)
Focus in the research

• High dropout rates as well as low levels of activity from participants are common and well documented in literature
• In this study, we focus on the motivation and expectations for the online learning experience amongst both participants and non-participants
• We are looking for input to future designs and MOOC-models for this particular target group and for national MOOCs in Denmark
The data

• Entry- and exit survey with all registered participants in the two interactions
• Entry survey questions in 2 categories:
  – Demographics and background
  – Interest and expectations about the MOOC
  – Population is 206 participants – response rate is 27 % (79 respondents)

• Exit survey questions in 3 categories:
  – Demographics and background
  – Experiences and satisfaction with the MOOC
  – Suggestions for improvements
• Population is 205 participants – response rate is 25 % (72 respondents)
Preliminary findings – entry survey 1/2

• 84 % women; majority between 35-54 years: 42 + 24 % = 66 %
• Highest level of education: 14% have a bachelor’s degree, 47% have a masters degree, less than 5% have a Ph.D.
• Previous experience with online courses: 41% yes (6% don’t know – uncertainty about terminology?)
• Signed up as ‘individuals’ (84 %), only 13% signed up together with colleagues or fellow students
• How much time are you expecting to spend pr. Week: 79 % say under 10 hours pr. week (49 % less than 5 hours)
Preliminary findings – entry survey 2/2

How do you prefer to work/learn in this MOOC:

- Read texts: 88% agree or strongly agree
- Watch videos: 89% agree or strongly agree
- Read comments from other participants: 58% agree or strongly agree
- Get feedback from tutor: 73% agree or strongly agree

What do you hope to achieve?

- Learn new things about the topic: 73%
- Add further dimensions to my current work: 60%
- Looking for the experience of participating in an open online course: 34%
In the exit survey responses (72 in total), 13% participated in the entire course; an additional 32% participated in parts of the course, and 53% did NOT participate in the course.

- How are you employed:
  - Full time: 68%
  - Part time: 10%
  - Full time students: 13%
  - Unemployed: 7%

Time expected?
- 79% say under 10 hours pr. week (49% less than 5 hours)

Time spent?
- 84% spent under 10 hours / week (51% less than 5 hours)
Preliminary findings – exit survey 2/2

• How might the course be improved?
  – Stronger connection / contact between tutor and participants
  – Higher degree of freedom in the topics you choose (and not choose) to study
  – A more uniform design line – the modules were too different

• Would you be interested in signing up for a similar kind of course in the future:
  – Yes: 75 %
  – No: 1 %
  – Don’t know: 24 %
Exit survey – non-participants

Participation in the entire course: 13 %
Participated in parts of the course: 32 %
No participation in the course: 53%

What prevented you from participating?

- Not enough time: 72 %
- Couldn’t find time during working hours: 22 %
- I lost interest after signing up: 13 %
- I never intended to participate, but was curious to see the course and the materials: 11 %
Reasons for not completing

What should have been different for you to participate?

• Comments fall in three categories (roughly):
  – Suggestions for redesign (learning design)
  – Suggestions for additional use of technology/communication
  – Reference to personal situations, mostly time-issues
Examples of suggestions

• Use push technologies (reminders, personalized calendar/time schedule)
• Make the course more flexible (longer time, less fixed deadlines for assignments)
• Place the activities when I have the time (away from exam times, in evenings/weekends, during the summer break)
• Less assignments and student activities, more materials to explore on your own (portal rather than course)
• But also: More time for the assignments and more feedback from tutors
• Nothing – the concept is fine, I just didn’t have the time (several respondents say this)
Reflection on data

- Survey data predominantly descriptive
- Deeper analysis not done yet – e.g. looking for typologies amongst the respondents

- Next steps
  - Completing the second round of data collection (entry survey done)
  - Selecting respondents for interviews
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