MOOC – The Impact of its Disruption in Higher Education

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Abstract

Education has undergone various changes with time. The 20th century witnessed the conventional chalk and talk system in higher education being replaced by Power point presentations, videos and live interactive sessions. Teachers become facilitators in imparting knowledge. The knowledge era of the 21st century brought in a cornucopia of changes over the entire world. The emerging technologies like Big data, Artificial Intelligence had disrupted almost all the industries including the Higher education domain. Nevertheless, the impact of the technologies in the education sector has to be viewed with a different perception in contrast to the profit making view of the other industries. Among the new technologies, this paper has focussed on MOOC -Massive Open Online Course and the intensity of the disruption it has brought in the education sector. An overview of MOOC, its advantages, the major beneficiaries of MOOC, the business model of MOOC, the monopoly of few Universities behind it, the impact of its disruption and the future classrooms and teachers are the proposed research areas. This paper in specific analyses the impact of MOOC on college students.

Keywords : MOOC, Disruption, Higher Education, Future Classrooms, Business Model

Introduction

MOOC refers to online course available on the internet, which is mostly free and is targeted on a large number of participants all over the world. The first MOOC was made available in 2008 for a course named Connectivism and Connectivity Knowledge by educators, Downes and Siemens. The Course enabled the participation of versatile participants by using online tools. Soon various Universities started offering these courses and there was a good number of registrations. The fact that it is available online, for free, at your convenience with world class standards became the USP of these courses. Millions of users all around the world, enrol themselves in these courses through various service providers like Coursera, EDx, Udacity, etc. The participants usually include college students, academicians, corporate employees and people who do not have the opportunity to attend college. The learning intentions of the participants are different and in the same way their take ways. One could just browse the content, learn it seriously and take the assignments and go to the next level of certification. All this is based on the participant's discretion.

Methodology & Objectives

This study is part of the working paper on " MOOC – Is it a real Disruptor in India?". . While the major study makes use of quantitative data and analysis, the study provided here is conceptual in nature, following the narrative and discussion style. The study has adopted the descriptive methodology and narration of facts, similar to a case study. The study has the following objectives:

- To provide an overview of the MOOC technology.

- To relate MOOC with disruption and gain insight on that front.

- To discuss on the impact of MOOC in a regular classroom.

Review of Literature

Christensen et al (2013) in their working paper had discussed that the main motivator behind student's taking MOOC are for advancement on their current level and to satisfy curiosity. It is found that MOOC is of great help to the people who do not have access to higher education in developing nations.

Jordan, K. (2014) has made a comprehensive study and accounted the enrollment in the MOOC, the percentage of completion and the relationship between them. When the MOOC was introduced, there was a great hype and the enrolments were huge. As the number of service providers increased, there was a decrease in the enrolments. Majority of courses had 10 percent completion rate with a median average of 6.5 percent. As the author had mentioned, the completion rate alone will not determine the success of the course. Participants may have benefitted without completion by gathering the knowledge and making advancements. However, completion rate cannot be ignored as this helps in identifying the rationale behind taking MOOC courses and the reasons which stop them from getting it completed or obtaining a certificate.

Devgun, P. (2013) in her research had analyzed the enthusiasm of the participants in taking the MOOC. She argues that MOOC could be viewed as a great platform to achieve the goal of higher education and it is beneficial to the learner, University and the industry as well. The research has also attempted to provide a framework for all the stakeholders in the creation and usage of MOOC.

Rai and Chunrao(2016) had studied the success and failures in online learning and had concluded that it mostly depends on personal factors rather than external environment. While the external environment may have a role in the traditional class room learning, the distributed individual mode of learning governs the learning process in MOOC.Better quality

learning methods and modes should be made available to the students, failing which MOOC would merely serve as an online repository of knowledge.

The brief reviews collected for this study reveal that MOOC cannot be entirely stamped as a successful platform. It is an emergent technology with considerable success rates which rely on various factors. It has to be also borne in mind that it is extremely beneficial to participants who do not have access to higher education and for them it is a great avenue. The completion rate of MOOC is also high among the participants of under developed and developing nations who do not have access to formal education. So here raises the question of the regular students who are enrolled in colleges and who take up a MOOC. They are also knowledge seekers and aspire for new updates through MOOCs. Hence the study discusses about these students and the influence of MOOC in classrooms.

MOOC and Disruptive Technology(DT)

Christensen's (1997) in his thesis had summarized disruptive technology and its impact. A disruptive technology, initially would underperform the existing technology and would come at a cheaper cost. The mainstream customers would not be interested in it and they would still use the dominant technology. The DT is commercialized in insignificant market; it slowly gains momentum and the trust of the customers and finally replaces the mainstream market.

When we try applying this constructs to MOOC, we find MOOC to be fitting in most of them. MOOC is initially aimed at the participants who seek online knowledge and not on mainstream students. They were first available completely free and the pricing factor had been introduced slowly. We find the western Universities dominating the MOOC market, with their course content and gyan. The business model is a separate case to be studied. MOOC has gained momentum and whether it would replace the mainstream technology is under question and needs analysis on various fronts.

Classroom Teaching & MOOC

The class room teaching usually consists of pre class, in class and post class activities. Reading notes, cases are given as pre class assignments to the students so that they get an insight into the course. The in class activity is the time when the teacher acts as facilitator and enhance the learning through sense giving, sense making and imbibing of the concepts. The post class activity is on reflections, interpretations and applications of the concept.

The pertinent question here is "Could/Would MOOC replace a teacher?" In this technology driven world, all information pertaining to a course are available online. A student could access them through his Smartphone/laptop. Textbooks themselves come with online access to content, exercises and simulations. Most textbooks are now designed to serve flipped classrooms. So these interactive CDs, online content including MOOC help in enhanced learning and to a certain extent on enhanced teaching too. They could be instruments of pre and post learning. The real time learning in the class is always facilitated by the teacher.

Challenges faced by teachers

With the availability of online learning resources, the class room is no longer of uniformly informed students. The class may have students who are uninformed, partially informed and misinformed. Dealing with the partially informed and misinformed students is the real challenge here. The class has to be highly interactive and open to various types of perceptions from the students. The students should feel that class room is the place where they can learn, unlearn and relearn, hand holded and facilitated by the teachers, out of their experience and wisdom. The human factor is the differentiating element here.

Conclusion

As already discussed, MOOC is utilised by various participants. For participants, who do not have an opportunity or access to higher education, MOOC is a great breakthrough. For continuous learners like professionals, entrepreneurs and academicians, MOOC serves as yet another easily available platform for knowledge gathering. For regular students, MOOC is an enhancer which could supplement their class room learning. Never the less, the teachers of the knowledge era have the fiduciary responsibility to keep abreast with the teaching learning technologies, in addition to their domain expertise.

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