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A snapshot of MOOCs in hospitality and tourism

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Abstract

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are a significant disruptive innovation in the current higher education environment. Although the media and academia often make sweeping generalisations about MOOCs, ranging from a utopian to dystopian future, such hyperbole about innovations is common, and often misguided. Critics focus on the dismal completion rates, typically less than 10% while pundits laud the massive and global enrolments. This paper helps ground the hyperbole, reviewing MOOCs in the broad discipline of hospitality and tourism and provides a snapshot of the eight MOOCS currently on offer.

Keywords: Hospitality, MOOCs, eLearning, Tourism

Introduction

A growing surge of academic and media articles debate and pontificate the emergence and evolution of MOOCs, Massive Open Online Courses (Daniel, 2012; Klobas, Mackintosh & Murphy, 2014). These online educational juggernauts offer free online education, often similar to or actual courses with leading universities, simultaneously to tens or even hundreds of thousands of participants. Learners that complete course requirements and achieve a minimum mark, from 40 to 80%, receive a certificate of completion ─ albeit no official university credit ─ from host institutions such as Harvard, MIT and Stanford (Klobas et al, 2014). The number of MOOCs keeps increasing, almost doubling ─ 2,112 to 4,121 ─ from March 2014 to February 2015

[openeducationeuropa.eu/en/european_scoreboard_moocs].

MOOC studies in hospitality and tourism, however, are few (Hara, Moskal & Saarinen, 2013; Murphy, Kalbaska, Williams, Ryan, Cantoni & Horton-Tognazzini, 2014). Nor is there a list of hospitality/tourism MOOCs. This dearth of MOOC information contrasts with tourism and hospitality generating an estimated $7 trillion globally and employing one in 11 workers. Employers, academia, educational institutions and learners acknowledge two growing educational trends in hospitality and tourism: the importance of different learning styles and lifelong education (Cuffy, Tribe & Airey, 2012; Rodríguez-Antón, Alonso-Almeida, Andrada & Pedroche, 2013). MOOCs provide an environment to accommodate different learning styles and an avenue for those seeking lifelong education. This paper adds to the nascent MOOC research by finding, listing and reviewing existing MOOCs in tourism and hospitality.

Literature Review: What is a MOOC?

MOOCs, the latest in a long line of distance learning innovations, are free online courses (Daniel, 2012). As MOOCs have no entry requirements they provide unlimited participation, open access to courses and certification of successful completion.

In 2008, The University of Manitoba launched the first MOOC, *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge*. The MOOC hosted 25 fee-paying students and 2,200 non-paying online students (Daniel, 2012). But, not until 2011with massive, 150,000+, enrolments in

both a Stanford and a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) MOOC did the media and academia take note, culminating in The New York Times proclaiming 2012 as "The Year of The MOOC" (Pappano, 2012).

Methodology

Four major challenges, and limitations, of this study are the dynamic nature of MOOCs, finding relevant MOOCs, finding MOOC information and defining a MOOC (Daniel, 2012; Murphy, Kalbaska, Horton-Tognazzini & Cantoni, 2015). MOOCs may run only once and then disappear (Murphy et al., 2014). Perhaps the most comprehensive MOOC study to date began with a list of 279 MOOCs (Jordan, 2014). Online searches and crowd-sourcing of these 279 MOOCs yielded enrolment numbers for 91 courses, completion rates for 42 courses and active user information for 33 courses. To the authors' knowledge, just one hospitality and tourism MOOC study shares active user information (Hara et al., 2013).

For this study, tourism and hospitality MOOCs were identified via online searches and a posting to the Tourism Research Information Network (TRINET) mailing list of over 2,400 tourism and hospitality academics and professionals. The researchers defined a MOOC as open ─ no fees, no pre-requisites or required activities ─ online courses with assessment, recognition and the capacity for thousands of learners (Murphy et al., 2015). Researchers only included MOOCs that did not require pre-registration to view content.

Results

The methodology above yielded eight MOOCs in tourism and hospitality, .2% of available MOOCs. Table I below lists the results and provides links to each of the eight MOOCs identified. Five of the eight MOOCs are in English, two are in Spanish and one in English, Arabic and Italian. All but one MOOC have fixed dates. Two MOOCs launched in 2013 with most starting in 2014. One MOOC has run twice.

Table I: Tourism and Hospitality and MOOCs

Provider	Course	Debut	Latest Offer	Weeks	Languages
Cornell University	*Introduction to Global Hospitality Management*	2015	02/15-04/15	6	English
Escuela de Organización Industrial y l'Ajuntament de Benissa	*Innovación en Turismo Cultural*	2014	2014	8	Spanish
Harvard	*Science and Cooking: From Haute Cuisine to the Science of Soft Matter*	2014	06/15	13	English
Taylor's University	*Wonderful Styles of Food and Beverage Around the World*	2014	05/14	5	English
Taylor's University	*Introduction to Wines 101*	2014	09/14	14	English
Universitat de Girona	*Cambios en el Turismo Contemporaneo*	2013	03/14	7	Spanish
University of Central Florida	*Tourism Industry Analysis*	2013	04/15	6	English
Universitia Telematica	*Statistics and Economic*			Self-	Arabic, English,

| Intemazionale | *Statistics of Tourism* | | | paced | Italian |

Floofl.com ─ an Oxford based social enterprise committed to provide free on-line learning for travel and tourism ─ offers eight hospitality/tourism MOOCs, these MOOCs were not part of this study due to log in requirements to view the content.

Discussion: Implications, Limitations and Future Research

The hospitality and tourism industry constantly faces challenges around skills shortages, staff turnover, seasonality and training. Employees of large corporate tourism enterprises need similar trainings, often requiring extensive travel. Utilising these eight MOOCs may help academia and industry address some of these training issues (Cantoni, Kalbaska & Inversini, 2009).

As noted above four major limitations of this study are the dynamic nature of MOOCs, finding relevant MOOCs, finding MOOC information and defining a MOOC (Daniel, 2012; Murphy et al., 2015). Due in part due to the newness of MOOCs and the small discipline size, the few existing hospitality and tourism MOOCs is another limitation. The difficulty obtaining data about existing MOOCs is a further limitation and future research stream.

Future research could expand this study's Table I, organising proposed variables into supply and demand (Murphy et al., 2015). Supply variables could include MOOC pedagogical types and content, estimate of participant workload, formal recognition and historical and projected availability. Demand variables could include participant geo-demographics, engagement, and completion and satisfaction data. Future research could also include participants' view of the industry prior-to-and-upon-completion of a tourism or hospitality MOOC.

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