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RESEARCH NOTE

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 generalizations about MOOCs, ranging from a utopian to dystopian future, such hyperbole about innovations is common and often misguided. Critics focus on poor completion rates, typically less than 10%, whereas pundits laud the massive and global enrollments. This research note helps ground the hyperbole, reviewing MOOCs in the broad discipline of hospitality and tourism and providing a snapshot of the MOOCs currently on offer.

KEYWORDS

eLearning; hospitality;
MOOCs; tourism

Introduction

A growing surge of academic and media articles debate and pontificate the emergence and evolution of massive open online courses (MOOCs; 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 who 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, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Stanford (Klobas et al., 2014). The number of MOOCs keeps increasing, doubling—from 2,112 to 4,656—from March 2014 to May 2015 (Tableau Public, 2015).

MOOC studies in hospitality and tourism, however, are relatively few (Hara, Moskal, & Saarinen, 2013; Murphy et al., 2014; O'mahony & Salmon, 2014). There is also no list of hospitality/tourism MOOCs. This dearth of MOOC information contrasts sharply with the tourism and hospitality industry's economic impact. The World Travel and Tourism Council (2015) reported that the industry accounted for 277 million jobs (1 in 11 of all jobs) in 2014, almost 10% of the world's gross domestic product, and should expand by 3.7% during 2015 and by 3.8% over the next decade.

In addition, 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 in which to accommodate different learning styles and an avenue for those seeking lifelong education. This research note adds to the nascent MOOC research by finding, listing, and reviewing existing MOOCs in tourism and hospitality.

Literature Review: What is a MOOC?

MOOCs are the latest—not the last—in a long line of distance learning innovations. MOOCs are courses delivered online to the public for free (Barber, Donnelly, & Rizvi, 2013). As MOOCs have no entry requirements, they provide unlimited participation and open access to online resources with support from fellow learners through online forums. MOOCs also provide 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 nonpaying online students (Daniel, 2012). But not until 2011, with massive, 150,000+ enrollments in both a Stanford and a Massachusetts Institute of Technology MOOC, did the media and academia take note, culminating in the *New York Times* proclaiming 2012 as “The Year of the MOOC” (Pappano, 2012).

Two MOOC types, connectivist (cMOOC) and extended (xMOOC), anchor a range of MOOCs that are usually a hybrid of both types (Klobas et al., 2014).

In xMOOCs, instructors act as celebrities and content producers; cMOOC instructors tend to be guides and content facilitators (Chauhan, 2014; Ross, Sinclair, Knox, Bayne, & Macleod, 2014). Most MOOCs tend toward xMOOCs (Chauhan, 2014; Daniel, 2012). xMOOCs garner most of the attention, thanks in part to their affiliation with popular elite universities and major MOOC providers such as Coursera, edX, and Google (Murphy et al., 2014; Pappano, 2012; Wilkowski, 2013).

Methodology

Four major challenges, and limitations, of this research note 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 crowdsourcing of these 279 MOOCs yielded enrollment numbers for 91 courses, completion rates for 42 courses, and active user information for 33 courses. To our 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 mailing list of more than 2,400 tourism and hospitality academics and professionals. We defined MOOCs as open—no fees, no prerequisites or required activities—online courses with assessment, recognition, and the capacity for thousands of learners (Murphy et al., 2015).

Only MOOCs that did not require preregistration to view content were included. Eight MOOCs from Floofl were excluded because of log-in requirements. Launched in 2012, Floofl.com is an Oxford-based social enterprise committed to providing free online learning for travel and tourism. Floofl offers four academic MOOCs, three industry MOOCs, and one simulation MOOC.

Results

The methodology yielded 30 MOOCs in hospitality and tourism, just 0.6% of the total 4,565 available MOOCs. Tables 1 and 2 list information about the 30 MOOCs. The MOOCs in Table 1 tend to be shorter and target a broader range of participants than those in Table 2. Entry-level employees or those with weak English skills might be more comfortable with the MOOCs in Table 1 than those in Table 2.

Of the 30 MOOCs, 25 are in English only, two are in Spanish, one is in French, one is in Italian, and one is in English and French. In addition, two MOOCs provide subtitles. One such MOOC, Università Bocconi's Managing Food and Beverage Companies, is in English and provides English, Italian, Spanish, and simplified Chinese subtitles in recognition that English is often a second language for learners and lecturers.

MOOC Providers

By definition, all MOOCs in Tables 1 and 2 offer free certificates upon successful completion. For example, ALISON and Università della Svizzera italiana require a score of 80% to receive a certificate. The estimated number of required study hours varies from 2 to 3 hr

Table 1. Basic Tourism and Hospitality Massive Open Online Courses

Provider	Course	Platform Provider	Latest Offer	Hours	Weeks/Modules	Language
ALISON	Tourism: Marketing and Promotion	ALISON	2015	1–2	Self-paced/ 3 modules	English
ALISON	English for Tourism: Restaurant Service	ALISON	2015	2–3	Self-paced/ 2 modules	English
ALISON	English for Tourism: Tourist Information and Guided Tours	ALISON	2015	1–2	Self-paced/ 2 modules	English
ALISON	Introduction to the Development of the Tourism Industry	ALISON	2015	2–3	Self-paced/ 3 modules	English
ALISON	Tourism: Introduction to Retail Travel Sales	ALISON	2015	1–2	Self-paced/ 2 modules	English
ALISON	Tourism: Introduction to Travel Patterns and Destinations	ALISON	2015	1–2	Self-paced/ 3 modules	English
ALISON	Tourism Industry Sectors and Career Development	ALISON	2015	1–2	Self-paced/ 3 modules	English
ALISON	Diploma in International Tourism English Language	ALISON	2015	10–15	Self-paced/ 16 modules	English
ALISON	Introduction to Hospitality Management Studies	ALISON	2015	2–3	Self-paced/ 4 modules	English
Taylor's University	Wonderful Styles of Food and Beverage Around the World	Open Learning	5/2014		5	English

Table 2. Intermediate to Advanced Tourism and Hospitality MOOCs

Provider	Course	Platform	Latest Offer	Hours	Weeks/Modules	Language
ALISON	Diploma in Customer Service	ALISON	2015	6–10	Self-paced/ 9 modules	English
Cornell University	Introduction to Global Hospitality Management	edX	2/2015	18	6	English
Escuela de Organización Industrial y Juntament de Benissa	Innovación en Turismo Cultural		2014		8	Spanish
ESSEC Business School	The Fundamentals of Hotel Distribution	Coursera	9/2015	2–4 weekly	4	English
ESSEC Business School	The Fundamentals of Revenue Management	Coursera	11/2015		4	English with English subtitles
ESSEC Business School	Breaking Down Today's Commercial Silos	Coursera	11/2015		4	English
ESSEC Business School	"Hotel De'l'etoile": A Hotel in Crisis?	Coursera	12/2015		Case study	English
Università Bocconi	Managing Food and Beverage Companies	Coursera	7/2015	3–6 weekly	4	English with English, Italian, Spanish, and simplified Chinese subtitles
Harvard	Science and Cooking: From Haute Cuisine to the Science of Soft Matter	edX	6/2015	3–6 weekly	14	English
Taylor's University	Introduction to Wines 101	Open Learning	9/2014		14	English
The New School	Writing American Food	Canvas Network	5/2015		5	English
University of Adelaide	Innovators of American Cuisine	Canvas Network	5/2014		5	English
	World of Wine: From Grape to Glass	edX	6/2015	15	Self-paced/ 6 modules	English
Université de Bourgogne	Open Wine University	EMMA	11/2015	2 weekly	5	English, French
Università della Svizzera italiana	eTourism: Communication Perspectives	iversity	10/2015	3–4 weekly	8	English
Università Telematica Intermediale	Statistics and Economic Statistics of Tourism	OpenupEd	2015	25	Self-paced	Italian
Universitat de Girona	Cambios en el Turismo Contemporaneo	Mirriada X	3/2014	21	7	Spanish
Université de Jendouba and l'Université Toulouse—Jean Jaurès	L'écotourisme: Imaginons-le Ensemble	FUN	6/2015	2–4 weekly	7	French
University of Central Florida	Tourism Industry Analysis	Canvas Network	4/2015		7	English
University of Central Florida	Hospitality Financial Management	Canvas Network	10/2015		6	English

Note: MOOC = massive open online course; EMMA = European Multiple MOOC Aggregator; FUN = France Université Numérique.

total to 2 to 6 hr weekly. Eighteen MOOCs have fixed start dates and range in length from 4 to 14 weeks. The ALISON, University of Adelaide, and Università Telematica Internazionale MOOCs are self-paced; participants can start and finish at any time. Most MOOCs are at an introductory level and across a narrow range of topics: sales, travel patterns, food and beverages, hotel operations, and statistical analysis.

ALISON, a private provider out of Ireland, leads the MOOC numerical count with 10 tourism and hospitality MOOCs. ALISON's most recent tourism and hospitality MOOC, Introduction to Hospitality Management Studies, launched in August 2015.

ESSEC Business School, one of France's Grandes Ecoles with locations in Paris and Singapore, offers the second highest number of MOOCs, a sequential series of four. The second of the series has English subtitles and the fourth is a capstone case study.

In 2013, ALISON launched its first tourism and hospitality MOOC, Diploma in Customer Service. Unlike the majority of the tourism and hospitality MOOCs, which primarily target the workforce, this MOOC targets business managers, owners, and entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry. Upon successful assessment completion, and at no financial charge, the learner may elect to receive an ALISON diploma, a higher ALISON achievement than its certification (ALISON, n.d.).

Similarly, the University of Central Florida offered its first MOOC, Tourism Industry Analysis, in October 2013 and then again in April 2015. This University of Central Florida MOOC is the sole fixed-date MOOC to have run twice. Most of the other providers began offering their MOOCs in 2014.

Università della Svizzera italiana's eTourism: Communication Perspectives is the first MOOC to address eTourism, information and communication technologies, and its global and transformative role within the tourism and hospitality industry.

MOOC Platforms

Among the more than 4,000 MOOCs on offer, Coursera dominates as the platform provider at approximately 47% (Shaw, 2014). Yet Tables 1 and 2 show that Coursera's share is only 16% of the 10 tourism and hospitality platforms. ALISON leads as the top tourism and hospitality platform provider with 33%, or 10 of the 30 MOOCs. Coursera provides the platform for five MOOCs, followed closely by Canvas Network with four, edX with three, and Open Learning with two MOOCs.

Innovative and diverse platform providers listed in Tables 1 and 2 include the European Multiple MOOC

Aggregator. This pilot platform, supported by the European Union (European Multiple MOOC Aggregator, n.d.), takes a multilingual and multicultural approach to MOOCs, offering MOOCs in English, Catalan, Dutch, Estonian, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Polish. And iversity, a 2011 commercial MOOC platform provider out of Berlin, Germany, notes that it is "busy disrupting current educational norms, as we believe that any student in the world have access to an excellent education" (iversity, n.d.).

Finally, the French Ministry of Education and Research launched its national France Université Numérique MOOC platform in 2013, focusing on the educational needs of developing countries (France Diplomatie, n.d.).

Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

As noted in the Methodology section, 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). To demonstrate the dynamic nature of MOOCs, this study began in April 2015 with only 12 MOOCs in hospitality and tourism. By September 2015 that number had increased by 250% to 30.

Due in part to the newness of MOOCs and the small discipline size, the relatively few hospitality and tourism MOOCs on offer is another limitation. The difficulty obtaining data on existing MOOCs is a further limitation and future research stream.

The hospitality and tourism industries constantly face challenges around skills shortages, staff turnover, seasonality, and training. Employees of large tourism and hospitality enterprises are in constant need of specialized training and development, often requiring extensive travel. Not physically having to leave the workplace to take a particular course means that sources of knowledge broaden considerably and the cost to the employer of training staff is significantly less, especially if the MOOC is free.

MOOCs can play a pivotal role in the training and continuing professional development of hospitality and tourism staff, as they provide flexibility and, as noted previously, ameliorate the need for employees to leave the workplace, which is an advantage for the hospitality and tourism industries, in which, by their nature, employees are afforded limited opportunities to leave the workplace to undertake training or professional development. As access to opportunities for quality training is paramount to the future growth of hospitality and tourism, utilizing the MOOCs listed in Tables 1 and 2 may help address the hospitality and tourism

industries' training needs (Cantoni, Kalbaska, & Inversini, 2009).

Opportunities abound for educational institutions, academics, and practitioners to work in partnership with industry in developing new and exciting MOOCs. These MOOCs should directly target industry needs in order to fulfill the basic requirements of both the employer and employee. Brand-specific or innovative and concept-driven, boundless opportunities exist for the development of innovative courses that fill existing skills gaps and modern learners' desire for new knowledge.

Further commercial opportunities exist for educational institutions in developing MOOCs and offering assessment and skills recognition pathways. In the future, an employee might graduate with formal qualifications cobranded by the enterprise that employs him or her and the institution that provides credit for formal assessments. Educational institutions could then link to further education and training, with appropriate credit, at either vocational or higher education providers without the employee ever needing to leave his or her place of work or family in order to upskill.

In order to explore and expand MOOC possibilities the hospitality and tourism industries will need to embrace new technologies and the MOOCs concept and promote this new option for learning and development to all of their employees. Equally, the broader hospitality and tourism industries should find ways of incentivizing employees who take MOOCs to improve their skills and better their knowledge. Finding ways to engage their employees in the exciting and largely untapped space of MOOCs may even become a distinguishing factor for future employers of choice.

Future research could expand this study's tables, organizing proposed variables into supply and demand (Murphy et al., 2015). Supply variables could include MOOC pedagogical types and content. 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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tion on hospitality and tourism MOOCs. Finally, the International Federation for IT and Travel & Tourism (IFITT) has a working list of hospitality and tourism MOOCs at ifitt.org/hospitality-and-tourismmoocs/.

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