

Chances and Challenges: How to Make a Successful MOOC

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Abstract. As increasingly popular of MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), it is now widely recognized as a powerful strength in the process of educational innovation, which remains its own chances and challenges. MOOC has a great impact on the traditional education, especially the higher education. Universities, colleges and teachers have taken measures to face the challenges by creating their own MOOCs. With an analysis of the existing successful MOOC, ten effective tips we've discovered as follows: (1) Set a Definite Teaching Goal; (2) Make a Detailed Design; (3) Contents First; (4) A Simple and Interesting Title; (5) To Create a Multi-sensory Experience; (6) Light Humor is needed; (7) The Law of "10 to 15 min"; (8) To Tell a Few Good Stories; (9) Your PPT: More Pictures and Charts instead of Words; (10) Just be Yourself. By following these effective skills, it's more likely to create a more attractive and successful MOOC.

Keywords: Effective tips · MOOCs · Design strategy

1 Introduction

MOOC is the abbreviation of Massive Open Online Course. With the development of Internet and Information Technology, MOOC is becoming more prevalent among people especially younger ones in the e-learning era. An educational revolution may happen as nearly all kinds of MOOC appearing in the website platforms like Udacity, Coursera, edX and so on.

Compared with the traditional class, MOOC has many advantages. First of all, MOOC provides us abundant educational resources that anyone can reach it freely and conveniently only if he or she owns an electronic device connected with the Internet such as a computer, a Smart-phone or an tablet PC. Secondly, MOOC is much more impactful and economical than traditional courses. Different from the traditional classes, which can only serve dozens or hundreds of students, MOOC can easily enroll tens of thousands students or even more. Thirdly, as far as the students are concerned, MOOC has a better flexibility and selectivity. Not only can students decide which MOOC they want to take, but also they can choose it anywhere and anytime. Finally, MOOC can help strengthen the interactions between teachers and students. For instance, in a traditional classroom, some students remain high enthusiasm about

making a statement while others keep silence unless they are to be asked. Relevantly, during a MOOC, everyone can contribute to the courses with an equal opportunity to submit ideas, comments or questions. Anyone who wants to join the discussion just needs to type their ideas out instead of raising their hands.

Based on these strong points, MOOC has a great effect on the traditional education as well as the higher education, which attributes to much more pressure on teachers. Regarded as a big challenge, MOOC is also viewed as a chance to improve the quality of higher education. Many universities and colleges initiatively adjust themselves to the process by creating and uploading their own MOOC. According to an incomplete statistics, by the June of 2015, 286 Chinese MOOC were available on line. And so many famous universities in China like Peking University, Tsinghua University and Fudan University, have signed a cooperative agreements with international MOOC Platforms such as edX, Coursera and so on to speed up the development of MOOC. A lot of teachers have to redesign their courseware to fit the demand of a MOOC. As a result, the importance has been throwing a light on how to make a successful MOOC.

2 Chances of MOOCs Compared with Traditional Courses

Whether it is called OCW (open course ware), OER (open educational resource), or MOOC (massive open online course), the core change, compared with traditional courses, is to provide open educational resources and open learning process to anyone who has an intention to learn, mostly by free. As a educational revolution in this era, MOOCs have many chances superior to the traditional courses.

2.1 High-Quality Educational Resources

No matter what platform it belongs, MOOC will be assessed and selected before it is presented on line. So most courses offered by MOOC are taught by famous lecturers or teaching team in prestigious universities. In MOOC platform, we can easily find many courses from the top-ranking universities all over the world, such as Harvard University, Stanford University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as well as Peking University, Tsinghua University and Fudan University, etc. This means nearly everyone can easily access to these high-quality educational resources by the way of MOOC, which is unthinkable and impossible in the traditional teaching system.

2.2 The Characteristics of Large-Scale

“Massive” is one of characteristics of MOOC, which means in a MOOC it can hold a large-scale participants. Compared with a traditional classroom, which can room at most hundreds of students, a MOOC even can enroll thousands of participants at one time. Take an example, in a MOOC named *Financial Analyses and Decision Making* from Dr Xiao Xing, the professor of School of Economics and Management in Tsinghua University, there are totally 102,000 participants from 201 countries and districts all over the world who signed in the course, and among them 4320 registrants finished the course and obtain the certificate. This is hard to realize in the traditional courses.

2.3 Flexible Ways of Learning

For a learner, MOOC has provided much more flexible ways for their study. In a traditional course, the time and place are always scheduled, and students have to follow them to study. While in a MOOC, people can learn the teaching contents anytime and anyplace only if they have computers or other electronic devices connected with the Internet. Also they can choose to pause, review, fast-forward or repeatedly watch the videos to make sure they've understand the knowledge points thoroughly according to their own present level. Moreover, in a traditional classroom, communication always occurs among few people, when the conversation continues, the rest of class have to remained silent unless they are call upon. On the contrary, most of MOOCs have provided the discussion area, and anyone can join in the conversation by typing their questions or answering other peoples' questions without the need of raising their hands, which can help them to reinforce the knowledge points they've learned, to clarify the misunderstanding, to develop thinking and creativity and to improve their abilities of understand and utilization of the knowledge.

3 The Challenges Faced by MOOCs

Although MOOC has many chances compared with the traditional teaching mode, it also has many challenges. As a result, the development of MOOC has been restricted and faced many difficulties. For example, by far there are no universities or colleges offering the participants with credits for MOOC learning. Degree award and credits for certification raises a real problem for MOOC. In other words, it has a long way to go.

3.1 Low Completion Rate of MOOC

The low completion rate is a common problem for MOOCs. As time went on, a large number of participants have given up their study with unfinished contents of the course which they registered for the first beginning. Recent statistics shows that only 5% to 15% of the enrolled learners can persist to complete a course, and the attrition rate of MOOC is as high as 85% to 95% (Yu 2015). According to a survey, the completion rate of MOOCs is estimated as low as only about 5%–7% (Zheng 2014), which is unimaginable in the traditional courses. This phenomenon of 'alarmingly' low completion rates observed across MOOCs has aroused concerns from the scholars (Halawa et al. 2014).

3.2 Unsystematic Curriculum Design

Although providing various choices for learners, many MOOC platforms only offer different courses instead of organizing them to a systematic curriculum according to a specific major. While in a college or an university, there is a very strict curriculum design to ensure all necessary courses of a major can be scheduled in specific order and time. To realize the goal of talent cultivation, it's very essential and important to make a systematic curriculum design, which should be stipulated by professional development programs.

3.3 Lack of Face-to-Face Communication

The design of the discussion area or forum in a MOOC enables the learners to raise their questions, to share their feelings, to communicate with others by knocking on the keyboard or even through the camera and microphone. This is a convenient and effective way of communication, and people may feel less pressure. However, it is obvious that this way of communication through the screens can't replace a truly, face-to-face communication. In a MOOC, lectures always pay more attention to explain the knowledge points instead of showing their humanistic concern to the students. The lack of face-to-face communication makes a MOOC hardly meet the students' emotion needs.

3.4 The Issue of Teaching Quality Assurance

As we all known, the student-teacher ratio is seriously overweight in a MOOC's massive online learning process. In a MOOC, a few lecturers have to face thousands of students, and they must deal with a lot of things, such as to produce the teaching videos, design issues, upload their courses onto website, join the discussion and maintain the network, and so on. Although they devote most of their energy and time to prepare for the course, it's impossible for them to meet all the needs of so many students. The lack of understanding the real knowledge level and attitude of learners make teaching quality assurance remain a problem. On the other hand, the assessment of teaching effect is very difficult in a MOOC. In order to ensure the teaching quality in a MOOC, these problems such as the effectiveness of the test, to identify the real examinee from the surrogate exam-taker and cheating in the exam, etc. should be solved in the future.

4 How to Make a Successful MOOC

In order to conclude the effective tips of making a successful MOOC, our research group has taken a glance of hundreds of different types of MOOC in the Chinese website (<http://www.icourse163.org/>). What we have found is that all the popular MOOC own its own specific characteristics and common features. By analyzing these common features of the popular MOOC, we can draw a conclusion that the effective tips of making a successful MOOC can be list as follows:

4.1 Set a Definite Teaching Goal

Before starting the concrete work of making a MOOC, you should ask yourself several questions: What messages do you want to convey to your audience? Who is your target population? How to design your teaching process to fit the different demands of all kinds of students?... and so on. Once you clarified these questions, you will get a specific teaching goal and know how to realize it.

4.2 Make a Detailed Design

The design of a MOOC always includes a teaching objective design, a teaching strategy design and a teaching evaluation design. As for the teaching objective design, we have mentioned above. The teaching strategy design can be divided into a teaching resources collecting strategy, a teaching process strategy and a teaching activity strategy. And the teaching evaluation design can be related to two sides: the evaluation of teaching and learning respectively. All these must be designed carefully and thoroughly.

4.3 Contents First

The contents of the course are always the most important in order to create a successful MOOC. The first concern of people to enroll in a MOOC is whether its contents can fit their needs. In the process of preparing a MOOC, the designer should pay more attention to the contents of the course. Please make sure that contents are the soul of a successful MOOC and should be considered for the first place. All the factors such as the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness related to the contents, should be selected and designed carefully.

4.4 A Simple and Interesting Title

A simple but interesting title as well as the names of its chapters and sections for a MOOC take a very important part. It's a common sense that people prefer to the briefness while problem-solving. It's the interesting things not boring ones that make people easily to understand. Therefore, a simple and interesting title can always catch people's attentions and interests, which is extremely important of people's firstly choosing phrase of a MOOC. Take a MOOC of Fudan University as an example, the name of "Microbes and Human" is much better than the one of "Microbiology". What's more, the name of one of its sections—"How far AIDS from us?" seems much more attractive to people.

4.5 To Create Multi-sensory Experience

As we all known, multi-sensory experience is good for improving the effectiveness of learning. There are many ways you can choose to deepen people's impressions. Making a personal talk-show, presenting some beautiful pictures, telling a few of jokes, inserting a section of video or interview and even making an experiment on the spot as examples. While preparing your teaching process in a MOOC, you should try your best to arouse the sensory channels of the audience as many as possible, because the more their senses involved in the teaching process, the better the teaching effect is.

4.6 Light Humor is Needed

The sense of humor is always an elegant and welcomed personality trait. In some specific situation, the proper light humor can help people to release the mental pressures, melting the embarrassment and even to defuse the conflicts. To bring some light humor

in your MOOC can make your presentation more interesting and relaxing, and it can also help you to show your intelligence and confidence while dealing with an academic problem. With the help of some light humor, your students would feel better and enjoy the class.

4.7 The Law of “10 to 15 Minutes”

“10 to 15 min” is a golden law for one section of a MOOC. The period of time is enough for a lecturer to elaborate a theoretic or practical problem, or to express his ideas and attitudes toward an issue. Also, it is the extreme limits that a person focuses his attention on something. Please remember the fact that in the era of Internet, most people who enrolled in a MOOC don’t have too much time as well as patience, and the fragmentation of time naturally leads to fragmentation of learning. So make sure to simplify your expression and finish a section with this time limits.

4.8 To Tell a Few Good Stories

Good stories can always stir people’s heart, moving them and encouraging them to improve themselves and conquer the difficulties to reach their goals. The skill of telling a few good stories is extremely important in the teaching process of a MOOC. Normally, a story has 4 basic elements: plot, characters, setting and theme. A good story teller often selects the proper story by evaluating these four basic elements. So you can follow that, too. To choose a story for a MOOC, it’s always a wise choice to tell a story about your own experience. Peng Kai-ping, professor of Tsinghua University, had been told a good story about fortune-telling based on his own experience in his MOOC “Introduction of Psychology”, which gained widely praises by leading the audience to experience the challenge, analyzing the situation and finding a way out.

4.9 Your PPT: More Pictures and Charts Instead of Words

PPT is always an important and essential tool to aid your teaching in a MOOC as well as an traditional teaching process. However, as a lecturer in a MOOC, you shouldn’t rely too much on your PPT by preparing a lot of words and characters. Although they are helpful as a hint for your speech, according to the study of educational psychology, PPT with too many words and characters will dramatically weaken the learning interest of the students and let them feel bored. As a replacement, you can prepare more beautiful pictures and elaborate charts in your PPT. Make sure that the purpose of your PPT is to help the students understand your ideas more easily, to find out the logic among the knowledge points and to stimulate their learning enthusiasm. By putting more pictures and charts in your PPT, you have more chance to draw the students’ attention and raise the attraction of your MOOC.

4.10 Just be Yourself

When giving your presentation in a MOOC, you just need to be yourself. Never try to put on an act in a MOOC because it’s easy for people to recognize a real you. What you

need to do is to share your passion and personality fully to your audience. To be yourself can present a real person instead of an actor to people who will choose the course and it will help you to reach a closer relationship with your audience. By doing so, you can gain more trust from your students. Just like an old saying in China, “A student will believe in teachings only when he gets close to his teacher”, “just be yourself” can bring even more in a MOOC than that what you have thought.

5 Conclusion

From the analysis above, we can draw a conclusion that nowadays MOOC has played a very important part in our educational system. The popularity of MOOC is a great strength in the process of educational innovation. The storm of MOOC can be a big challenge as well as a big chance. It has even more great impact on the higher education, and we should prepare well to fit the challenge. To make a successful MOOC, these effective tips talked about above are crucial. With the help of these skills, we can create a MOOC more easily and effectively.

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