

From BOOKs to MOOCs: The Integration of Open Educational Resources to Library Services in American Spaces in East Asia and Pacific Region

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Abstract:

The changing role of libraries in the digital learning environment paved way to the rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in library services. From traditional to digital and collaborative era, this paper describes how MOOCs offered at the American Spaces, a public diplomacy library of the U.S. Department of State, increased open educational engagement with library users and meet the learning needs of the East Asia and the Pacific region.

Keywords: Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Embedded librarianship, American spaces

Background

Within the last three years or so, the learning environment and even the landscape of educational resources have undergone enormous change. Online and distance education has been in decades in formal education. However, it recently created a tremendous hype in terms of massiveness, openness and accessibility of knowledge that is called today as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (Cantwell, 2013)

Libraries played a central role in the learning ecosystem in the community. Parallel with the changes in education and learning, the influx of educational resources and technologies to connect learners to library services has rapidly changed over the past decade. From traditional approach of using books and reference interview visit with the librarian, we have seen the Internet change search habits inside libraries. Electronic books and Online Public Access Catalogs and Resources were introduced. (Stephens, 2013)

OCLC Vice President Cathy De Rosa (2014), in her annual OCLC report, mentioned the concept of participatory learning and self-directed learning that is happening now in libraries. Library users are now connected into social media, accessing open access resources such as e-books and are now watching online learning services like MOOCs. This hype and phenomenon change the landscape and expectation for education and learning towards libraries and created new value in the learning environment.

MOOCs

Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs is a term used to massively scalable online course that are generally available for anyone in the world to take for free with no formal entrance requirement. It is configured to make educational content openly available on the Internet (Carmen Kazakoff-Lane, 2013)

The early wave of MOOCs began around 2008 out of the Open Educational Resource movement of the UNESCO when National Research Council of Canada and University Professors George Siemens and Stephen Downes introduced the platform called as Connectivist MOOCs (cMOOCs) and emphasized both active student learning and knowledge creation using the technology. The platform was piloted in University of Manitoba in Canada, where 2,300 students enrolled in the online course. (Leber, 2014)

In the United States, MOOCs began through university-led initiatives. In the fall of 2011, Stanford University offered the first three MOOCs on Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Introduction to Databases. Few months later, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University followed the hype by offering MOOCs which garnered thousands of enrollments. (Watters, 2013)

The following year prompted the New York Times to crown 2012 as the “Year of the MOOC” where three of the best-known U.S. MOOC platforms namely Coursera, edX and Udacity have grown from seven courses and hundred thousand of registrants into 4 million learners taking 453 courses (Parr, 2014)

The popularity of MOOCs not only grew in North America but also in Europe and Asia. As a matter of fact, a consortium of British universities launched FutureLearn, a MOOC platform in 2012 (Kazakoff-Lane, 2013) At the recent meeting of United Nations to tackle about accessibility of education in the developing countries, Anant Agarwal, the founder of edX platform emphasized that 1.2 million students from non-western countries particularly in Asia have signed up to MOOCs and are now offered from universities in 20 countries including India, Mexico, France and Hong Kong. He added that several MOOC platform initiative have being developed including the consortium of Middle East universities to come with a MOOC platform called Edraak and China also launched their own platform called XuetaangX to promote scholarly and literary resources in China to the world. (Leber, 2014)

Because of the hype of MOOCs, numerous NGOs like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has become a big supporter of MOOCs to make this as an innovative way of communicating knowledge and information to the community (Chant, 2013)

According to UNESCO, open online education is the best hope to meet the demand for higher education and make quality education widely accessible at a no cost especially in the developing countries. Furthermore, According to Leber (2014) MOOCs have become partner of the education sector for the purpose of adult skills enrichment and to reduce drop-out rate in schools.

MOOCs and libraries

As more and more governments and universities experiment with MOOCs, Libraries are also preparing itself from the changes of outmoded technologies into a video-based and social designed resources like MOOCs. (Kendrick & Gashurov, 2013) Pawlowski (2013), a tech savvy educator calls American librarians to adopt on the emerging technologies such as

wikis, web 2.0 social media and most recently the MOOCs by becoming embedded librarians.

Library champions define embedded librarianship as the act of sharing, understanding the dynamics between individuals within the department as well as relationship between departments to departments and higher administrators. Embedded librarian's goal is to innovate, open access, drive change, promotes participatory culture and build human connections and conversations among community of learners. (Barnes, 2013)

In an article about embedded librarianship, Loertscher & Koechlin (2013) highlighted that librarians should be involved in online education so not to be bypassed by technology and not lose relevance to students and faculty. The librarian can be a driver towards student success within both environments, the MOOC and the library. (Cantwell, 2014)

MOOCs have raised awareness of open access education among governments, NGOs, universities and the general public. Now, libraries are positioning itself to provide citizens of the world with access to knowledge, to work with higher education, stakeholders and provide more video-based learning environment to promote a participatory culture in the community. (Kazakoff-lane 2013)

Libraries are jumping on the MOOC bandwagon to oversee MOOC development, and management from the creation up to the preservation. The first libraries to join the hype of the MOOC were public libraries. In 2010, Chicago Public Library introduced the Learn4Life MOOC programs offering adults a professional and vocational skills on warehouse management, sewing and cooking. Orange County Library System in Orlando partnered with TreeHouse company, a video-based resource on technology as part of digital literacy promotion of the library. Ed2Go, a Gale Cengage video-based database partnered with Atlanta-Fulton Public Library to engage their patrons to adult literacy and to promote continuing education skills initiatives of the library. (Schwartz, 2013)

Moreover, In 2011, New York Public Library partnered with Lynda.com to provide free video access to business, software, technology and creative skills to achieve personal and professional goals. Most recently, NYPL partnered with Coursera's Learning Hub to provide face-to-face classes to MOOC students inside public libraries. (Kolowich, 2014)

Parallel with the efforts of public libraries in the United States, In 2013, The U.S. Department of State has also joined the MOOC bandwagon to provide blended learning of both online and face-to-face facilitated discussion in American Spaces via Coursera's Learning Hub and edX projects.

Methodology

Objective

The primary objective of this study is to describe and identify how MOOCs work at the American Spaces, determine how MOOCs offered at the American Spaces increased open educational engagement with library users and meet the learning needs of the East Asia and Pacific Region.

Methods

A qualitative approach was followed for this study. A survey was conducted with the U.S. Embassy posts in the East Asia and Pacific Region (EAP) of the U.S. Department of State

namely: Beijing (China), Shanghai (China), Guangzhou (China), Changchun (China), Shenyang (China), Bangkok (Thailand), Jakarta (Indonesia), Manila (Philippines), Phnom Penh (Cambodia), Rangoon (Myanmar), Seoul (Korea), Daegu (Korea), Suva (Fiji), Vientiane (Laos), and Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam). The survey was not designed to be exhaustive, but to be exploratory on the perspective of the post and perspective of the participants. Furthermore, Data from all the classes facilitated on the aforementioned U.S. Embassy posts above from Fall 2013 to Spring 2014 is included and analyzed. Data gained from responses shared a common level of importance with qualitative replies from survey participants.

Findings

American spaces and MOOCs

The American Spaces are public diplomacy platforms of the U.S. government to exemplify the U.S. Commitment to a core tenet of democracy: the citizen's right to free access to information. With over 700 Spaces in 169 countries worldwide, American Spaces provide welcoming environments where visitors can connect and learn about the United States. Hosted in embassies, schools, libraries, and other partner institutions worldwide, American Spaces are venues for providing information about the United States, American policy, culture, and values; English language learning; U.S. study and exchange opportunities, U.S. alumni activities, and information about study in the U.S. (Department of State, 2014).

Since American Spaces serve as spaces for information, conversations and engagement, MOOCs are a promising tool to meet public diplomacy goals of the U.S. Department. Offering free U.S. Educational courses in various disciplines, U.S. Embassy posts provide an outstanding opportunity to engage youth on issues of high priority. Most MOOCs are developed in the United States and their use overseas is an opportunity for international students to experience a U.S. classroom environment in American Spaces. Furthermore, MOOCs are used as a tool to strengthen relationship between the U.S. And the foreign post country by drawing audiences in American Spaces.

In 2013-2014 respectively, the U.S. Department of State initiated its first-ever MOOC Camp program to host facilitated discussion around MOOCs at American Spaces located in U.S. embassies, consulates and partner libraries and institutions. Facilitated discussions in both face-to-face and social media are led by variety of key people including U.S. government alumni, State Department Junior and Senior diplomats who are familiar and expert with the course content. 15 U.S. embassy posts in the East Asia and Pacific (EAP) region participated in the round of MOOCs offered from December 2013 to April 2014, in subjects ranging from entrepreneurship, social sciences, English language learning, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). In line with the mission goals of the U.S. Department of State, course content is drawn from major MOOC providers, including Coursera and edX, as well as from State Department open course ware provider including the University of Oregon and University of Pennsylvania.

From the perspective of U.S. Embassy posts

Based on the pre-survey answered by the U.S. embassy posts, initial interest to conduct MOOCs was strong, with 18 EAP posts expressed a desire to participate and/or requested further information regarding MOOC courses. Out of 18 EAP posts who showed interest, 15 EAP post actively participated in offering a MOOC in their respective posts. These posts reported a total of 455 participants attended at least the first meeting of their facilitated MOOC. In addition, these posts were supported by various key people including political, economic, and English language officer who have facilitated series of programs in American

Spaces. Some EAP posts started to use social media platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Kakao Talk to continue the conversation online. While not all posts reported completion data, all of the posts that did the MOOC Camps and/or facilitation have significantly higher number of graduates than normal number of completion rates for online courses. U.S. Embassy in Manila, for example, reported a 69% completion rate of its 108 participants on the Video Games and Learning MOOC Camp while U.S. Embassy in Seoul, had 52% completion on its English Language MOOCs.

Posts reported several positive results from their participation in MOOC Camp, stating it allowed them to meet Embassy mission goals in their respective country. The MOOCs become support resources for English language teaching and learning. Other than English language programs, American Spaces strategically become a venue for educational outreach, promoting entrepreneurship and understanding of technology, and engaging the youth. The MOOC program definitely helped post to increase foot traffic to American Spaces particularly, the American Corners, a small library established with the support of local partner libraries and institutions situated outside U.S. Embassy posts.

“We will most likely participate again in the near future due to student’s overwhelming interest”, reported by one American Corner librarian in one of the EAP posts. “Most students are interested to any study opportunities in the United States but lack the confidence, exposure or knowledge to solidify that desire or make it a reality”. The MOOCs paved way to increase the interests of the students to the courses offered in the United States and that vague desire seem achievable and provide some context for the general idea of studying in the U.S., reported by another American Space staff.

In the 15 EAP posts, MOOC facilitation was an intra-US Department of State collaborative effort through the collaboration of US Government Alumni, Fulbright Scholars, EducationUSA advisors, Regional English Language Specialists, Junior and Senior Embassy diplomats and staff and PeaceCorps Volunteers. The facilitated model is strongly encouraged because of the added value to both the American Spaces and the participants themselves. It improves participant completion rates and learning outcomes, and provides American Spaces multiple opportunities to share perspectives, contacts, or resources available to participants interested either in studying in the U.S. or in the subject matter itself. In Vietnam, for example, local entrepreneur and alumni of a USG exchange programs facilitated the MOOCs; In posts in China, Philippines and Indonesia, Regional English Language Officer, Fellow and Specialists moderated the sessions in American Spaces. In Korea, MOOC Camps were facilitated in coordination with university professors situated in American Spaces outside the U.S. Embassy post.

The MOOC Camps and/or facilitation also took different forms, to reflect the needs and resources of each post. Many posts supplemented their in-person sessions with online social spaces via social media, such as a Facebook group, Facebook live, Twitter convo, to continue the learning and discussion online. In some places, such as in Manila, some facilitation was conducted online via Facebook chats. In Jakarta, post offered digital video conferencing to encourage the students to finish the course. Some posts held bi-weekly sessions and others held weekly discussions in American Spaces. English courses in particular used the weekly model, to hone language and skills of the participants. Some held panel discussions that supplemented the MOOC topic. In Manila, bringing in relevant guest speakers on topics of interest to the participants rounded out the course. For example, a local video game developer discussed business skills as a supplement to the material. In Ho Chi Minh, a panel discussion was held for entrepreneurs taking up a course on business. A common form of in-person activity to supplement the MOOC was a graduation or certificate ceremony at its conclusion, often with a senior embassy official including the ambassador as a guest/keynote speaker.

Overall, there were 61 sessions in 15 EAP posts offered 6 courses namely: Shaping The Way We Teach English (University of Oregon); Principles of Written English (University of California Berkeley); Video Games and Learning (University of Wisconsin Madison); Beyond Silicon Valley: Growing Entrepreneurship in Transitioning Economies (Case Western Reserve University); Applying to U.S. Universities (University of Pennsylvania) and 21st Century American Foreign Policy (Duke University). The most popular course was the Shaping the Way We Teach English administered by University of Oregon with 4 iterations of the course being facilitated worldwide. Second most popular was the 21st Century American Foreign Policy course offered by Duke University.

From the perspective of MOOC participants

The 55 MOOC participants from the U.S. Embassy posts in EAP who submitted a program completion survey represent 15 of the participating EAP posts. In EAP posts, majority of the participants are 18-23 years of age and still taking up bachelor's degree. 71% of the participants are female, while 29% are male.

In choosing MOOCs to offer, it was important to find courses that were not so difficult to avoid frustration of potential participants. The American Spaces selected courses that will not only support State Department's goals and objectives but also will fit the needs of the targeted audiences. Thus, the MOOC participants felt comfortable finishing the course. With a resounding "More, please," of the 55 MOOC participants who completed this survey, most participants highlighted the value participating in the MOOC Camps held for them in their respective American Spaces. Some mentioned this was their only opportunity to speak directly to Americans; that interacting with an American facilitator or guest speaker was a rare chance to listen to an expert of a particular subject. As one American Corner librarian reported, "Students are very excited and enthusiastic [to] experiment and experience studies through U.S. universities, and also appreciate the chance to practice and improve their English language skills. One MOOC participant reported, "I am motivated to finish the course because of the help of my friends in MOOC Camps". And a group of MOOC students reported, "We were motivated to complete the program since we will be receiving certificates from the university and from the U.S. Embassy". One post even reported an additional boost in skill set to their participants from having taken the MOOC Camp said that, "This MOOC really raised my [online] media literacy with the help of the American Spaces library."

Conclusion

MOOCs have become a value added library program of American Spaces in the EAP region. The American Spaces augment in the learning process of the MOOC participants by accessing the venue equipped with computers and Internet connection and library collection as an additional resource of the students. Second, The MOOCs become a regular library program of the American Spaces and engaged the stakeholders (e.g. U.S Embassy diplomats and U.S. government alumni) in a 21st century programming other than the traditional approach such as book talks and lectures. The MOOCs not only increased the foot traffic in American Spaces but also built a sense of community of learners in both physical library and virtual library via social media presence. The MOOC program helped promote participatory and collaborative learning experience among library users. The MOOCs also supported in building and leveraging the library user's soft skills including English language learning and public speaking skills. The MOOC program also opened doors to wide array of open and free access to resources including eLibraryUSA, which helped the students to finish the MOOC program. And lastly, MOOCs in American Spaces have facilitated interaction and

bridge the knowledge gap between the MOOC content providers and MOOC users in providing value added information and a collaborative learning space to the EAP region.

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