Student and faculty perceptions of the development and use of Massive Open Online Courses in clothing and textiles education

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Online learning environments are increasingly common in clothing and textiles (CT) education (e.g., see "Special Courses" on itaaonline.org). The newest variation is called a Massive Open Online Course (or MOOC). MOOCs are similar to college courses, but were developed in an attempt to revolutionize higher education. They are online courses aiming at large-scale global participation (e.g., up to thousands of students). Students can work at their own pace and on their own time, as well as further enhance learning through the use of social media for peer-interaction. MOOCs are offered by three dominant providers: Coursera, edX, and Udacity. Many universities have partnered with one of these providers to sponsor MOOCs for free or a nominal fee, offering students credit or a certificate for completion (Yuan & Powell, 2013). MOOC offerings have largely been limited to technical subjects and the hard sciences; MOOCs rooted in the humanities are still in the experimental and introductory phases (Education Advisory Board, 2012). Thus, the purpose of this study was to obtain introductory perceptions and evaluations regarding the use and development of MOOCs in CT education.

Participants were recruited via (1) online forums (e.g., Facebook) hosted by professional organizations and universities and (2) senior-level online fashion history and on-campus CT market analysis courses at one Northwest university. An online survey was conducted via Survey Monkey. The survey consisted of 10 questions designed by the researchers to measure familiarity with the concept of MOOCs, specific CT subjects that could be taught in a MOOC format, and participant perceptions of the positive and negative aspects of using the MOOC format for CT courses. A limited amount of demographic information (e.g., age, gender, student/faculty status, and college major) was also collected.

A total of 63 CT students and faculty from across the United States participated in the survey ranging in age from 18 to 65 (M = 23.3). The majority of participants were female (n=59; 93.6%). Fifty-two participants identified as undergraduate students, six identified as CT program graduates, and five identified as CT instructors/faculty/scholars. There were 26 respondents with a merchandise management background, followed by 15 with a background in apparel design, 7 with a background in design and merchandising management, 3 in business and/or marketing and 3 in historic and/or cultural aspects of dress. Descriptive statistics were used for quantitative data analysis and open-ended questions were analyzed via constant comparison.

The majority of participants were not familiar with and/or had not heard of MOOCs prior to taking the survey (n= 54, 85.7%). Only four participants reported having previously taken a MOOC course. Fifty-seven participants (n= 91.9%) reported that they thought the overall format

and principles of MOOCs would be helpful for their learning. The most commonly cited positive aspects included MOOCs being a good introduction for students new to CT programs and the CT industry (n= 20), convenience and ease of access to a MOOC course (n= 20), and being able to interact with other students and experience diverse perspectives (n= 18). The most commonly cited negative aspects included not getting enough hands-on experience with certain skills and subjects (n=19), less motivation and participation by students in online learning environments (n=15), less interaction with the instructor (n= 14), and a lack of college credit being earned (n= 12). Representative statements made by participants that elaborate upon these positive and negative aspects included the following: "There are no courses on accessories or shoes available at [my university] and this would be an awesome MOOC utilized by many students" and "How can you teach something tactile? How can students be taught to distinguish between silk satin and rayon satin?" Some unique opportunities and challenges were also addressed by instructors; including the ability to give students access to additional sources (e.g., virtual study tours of museum collections and guest speakers) and feedback management.

Fifty-two participants (n= 86.7%) reported that they would take a MOOC focused upon a CT-related topic if one was sponsored by their institution. The following is a list of CT-specific courses that participants felt would be most beneficial in a MOOC format: history of dress and/or textiles (n=28), textiles (n= 16), (sewn) product development (n = 15), fashion trend analysis and social/psychological aspects of dress (n= 13 each), and design software courses (e.g., courses teaching the applied use of Optitex and Adobe Illustrator) (n= 10). This data suggests that CT students and instructors would favor MOOCs related to topics that traditionally cater to conceptual and lecture-based learning, as opposed to hands-on learning. The struggles that hands-on courses might face in the MOOC format points to a significant difference between a course being visual versus hands-on. Though, several participants did list hands-on learning courses (e.g., tailoring, pattern drafting, fashion illustration, and draping) as possible courses that would thrive in the MOOC format.

This research suggests that (1) online learning remains popular and CT students and faculty would, in general, respond positively to the development of MOOCs focused upon CT topics and (2) considering the numerous positives and negatives that participants identified, there remains considerable uncertainty or ambivalence about how MOOCs would function when focused upon CT topics. Further exploration and research is needed. As barriers to the access of higher education continue to dissolve, CT programs are encouraged to begin a dialogue about the development of such courses at professional meetings (e.g., the annual ITAA meeting) and within individual departments and universities.

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