Social Media Literacies

and Perceptions of Value in Open Online Courses

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Abstract

This study sought to determine whether prior social media literacies among participants in a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) correlated with reported value experienced in the course. The study was carried out by questionnaire with volunteer participants from the Personal Learning Environments Networks Knowledge (PLENK 2010) MOOC. The study focused on critical digital and social media literacies such as networking and sharing. Findings suggest that even MOOC participants with low prior social media literacies report some value from the MOOC experience, and that further research into the factors that impact these perceptions of value may be warranted.

Introduction

Following the Canadian government's call for the country-wide improvement of digital skills (Government of Canada, 2010), the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) embarked on a research project to explore the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Model for open education. The premise of the project was that the digital economy is no longer the purview of the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, but rather of web-based collaborations and social media networks. The MOOC research team synthesized knowledge on digital skills and literacies in social media-based learning environments, of which Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are an example. This study, an addendum to the MOOC research project, surveyed participants in the Personal Learning Environments Knowledge Networks 2010 course (PLENK 2010). The study explored the correlation between the reported social media literacies possessed by PLENK 2010 participants prior to the course and the value they reported experiencing in the MOOC.

Purpose of this study:

Research into MOOCs matters, because it broadens the outdated ICT-sector-based view of "digital skills" found in the government's Consultation Paper on the Digital Economy (Government of Canada, 2010). Privileging the ICT sector and technologies themselves as the backbone of the digital economy reflects a lack of understanding of the personal and networked nature of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005), the dominant paradigm in digital technologies. "Achieving a knowledgeable Internet citizenry is unlikely to be resolved through a solely technical approach that focuses only on infrastructure without any consideration of the social processes and institutions in which people's Internet uses are embedded" (Hargittai, 2010, Introduction). Digital environments are participatory (Rheingold, 2007, McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). Thus it is not technological skills but social and participatory literacies that are required for innovation and meaningful knowledge-building on Web 2.0 platforms. As UBC's 2006 SSHRC proposal *Development by Design* points out,

> Research on the uses of ICTs in North American schools has yielded incontrovertible evidence that despite a massive expenditure on the provision of hardware, software, and connectivity, our capacity for educational innovation mediated by digital tools has proven resistant to development efforts. (Bryson, 2006)

If ICTs alone have been ineffective in achieving innovative, transformative goals even in supported classrooms, then they are an insufficient frame from which to try to achieve the government's stated goal of building national digital capacity. Successful digital learning innovations like the MOOC model, on the other hand, reflect the personal, networked, and openly collaborative practices and principles of Web 2.0. Canadian open education practitioners, among them the founders of the MOOC phenomenon, engage thousands of Canadians in digital skills development in ways that the ICT sector cannot achieve (McAuley, Stewart, Siemens & Cormier, 2010). Increased understanding of the literacies needed to succeed in a MOOC may indicate possible directions for Canada toward achieving its goal of increasing digital skills and capacity among its citizens. This study will indicate the extent to which the MOOC model for developing social media literacies may have value for a population without an existing skill base in the medium.

Context and Theoretical Framework:

A MOOC is an online course with free and open registration, publicly-shared curriculum, and open-ended outcomes. MOOCs integrate social networking, accessible online resources, and the facilitation of leading practitioners in the given field of study. Most significantly, MOOCs build on the engagement of learners who self-organize their participation according to learning goals, prior knowledge and skills, and common interests. The term came into being in 2008, though versions of very large open online courses were in existence before that time (McAuley et al, 2010). To date, topics have been within the E-learning and educational technologies fields. Some MOOCs have had upwards

of 2000 registrants (McAuley et al, 2010). MOOCs share in some of the conventions of an ordinary course, such as a predefined timeline and weekly topics for consideration, but have no fees, no predefined expectations for participation, and no formal accreditation.

Registration and course topics are offered through a central course site developed by facilitators: participants can use the central site to interact and discuss ideas, or may share their contributions from their own blogs and develop and maintain ties through other technologies such as Twitter. Participation in a MOOC is emergent, fragmented, diffuse, and diverse (McAuley et al, 2010). There is no credit or certificate offered for completion. Facilitators of MOOCs volunteer their time, and do comment on participants' input, but it is expected that the community of participants will be the source of feedback for the majority of work contributed. Diverse reaction to this expectation is one of the reasons that researchers wanted to consider how existing social media literacies affect MOOC participants' perceptions of value.

Literacies in a social media context are usually framed as multiple, rather than as one "literacy." This reflects the shift in educational research towards perceiving traditional text literacy as a combination of multiple skills (Collins, 1995). It also reflects the diversity of actions, skills and practices on which social media operates. Regular users of most social media platforms need print and visual literacy skills, but also information literacy, in terms of both critical thinking and hypertext use (Downes, 2006). Additionally, platforms are social spaces with complex etiquette norms that an effective user must be literate in to perform appropriately. Social media literacies are referred to as multiple because they do not represent a single, masterable skill, but rather an always-shifting set of practices in a complex environment.

As a result of the open-ended nature of MOOCs, traditional measures of success in a course environment do not apply. Like many enterprises in fields without traditional or institutional mentoring processes, MOOCs operate within the conceptual framework of Communities of Practice (Wenger,

1991). Similar forms of community collaboration with gradually scaffolded membership have been a hallmark of the internet. As Brown & Adler point out, “Open source communities have developed a well-established path by which newcomers can 'learn the ropes' and become trusted members of the community through a process of legitimate peripheral participation” (Brown & Adler, 2008, Learning to Be section, P 3). Legitimate peripheral participation allows people to be gradually mentored into meaningful contributory roles within a community; it also makes fringe participation acceptable. A study of MOOC participants found that only 15 of the 83 surveyed completed all course requirements (Fini, 2009, p. 8). Yet facilitators have noted the same people re-registering for multiple MOOCs over a period of time, gradually becoming more active within the community as suits their goals and personalities (G. Siemens & D. Cormier, personal communication, October 3rd, 2010). The concept of legitimate peripheral participation informed this study, in that the questionnaire was designed so that fringe participants' reported value for the course was not impacted by their minimal participation.

Research Question:

The primary research question posed by this study was how much do prior social media literacies assist individuals in achieving value from a MOOC? Because MOOCs to date have focused on topics related to E-learning and social media, both active and peripheral participants have been assumed to have some familiarity and facility with the social media tools and platforms on which the courses operate. By extension, the digital literacies of open sharing and collaboration are also assumed to be understood. Premised on the academic model of citation, wherein multiple citations of a particular paper add to the reputation of a scholar in his or her given field, the participatory practices of creating and sharing work and amplifying the reach of others' work are more than analog skills made digital. They reflect the concept of social learning in which understanding is socially constructed and invites “learning to be” rather than learning about (Brown & Adler, 2008). Anecdotal responses from participants in MOOCs have suggested that possession of these social literacies may be a better

indicator of the success and value an individual participant will get from a distributed and participatory learning experience like a MOOC than more traditional technological or informational literacies. The purpose is this study is to test to what extent that correlation may hold true. A high perception of value from a MOOC experience is hypothesized to correlate with high levels of previously established facility with the social media literacies of network engagement, sharing of personal contributions, amplification of others' contributions, and collaboration.

Literature Review:

The literature around social media literacies is still being developed. Participatory publishing platforms, including blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Youtube, Wikipedia, and most other phenomena captured under the designation "social media" can generally be categorized as Web 2.0 technologies. Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee (2000), always viewed what he called the Read/Write Web as a democratic, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) medium. Still, until the development of social media platforms, many of the potentialities for the web did not come to fruition. While the term Web 2.0 is not universally used and may be considered jargon (Delong, 2007), it does represent a useful before and after cleavage within digital literacies. Sherry Turkle, Nicholas Negroponte, Sandy Stone, Kathleen Tyner, Dale Spender, and Allan Luke have all published extensive and groundbreaking work in the fields of digital literacies, digital identities, and digital learning, but their best-known work predates the development of social media per se, or centers around Web 1.0 literacies. As Lankshear and Knobel, two of the key early theorists of digital literacies, explain the difference:

> Web 2.0 is defined by a 'post-industrial' world-view focused much more on 'services' and 'enabling' than on production and sale of material artefacts for private consumption. Production is based on 'leverage', 'collective participation', 'collaboration' and distributed expertise and intelligence. (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 227).

More broadly, where Web 1.0 literacies emphasized things people could do with technologies, Web 2.0 literacies tend to be more about things people do with each other via technology. Web 2.0 was originally described as a means of "harnessing collective intelligence" (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 3).

Using the term "literature" in reference to social media literacies requires an open attitude towards definitions. While most of the influential thinkers driving change and conceptual development within this field are affiliated, in one way or another, with universities, many do not limit their publishing to traditional, academic, peer-reviewed channels. Social media literacies are in part about having the power to construct and contribute knowledge: this can be framed as either a challenge to or an opportunity for 21st century academia. "Social media makes transparent the messiness of collaboration and provides opportunities for institutions to rethink top-down models of learning" (Madsen-Brooks, Blankenship & Sawhill, 2009. Abstract). Academics and public intellectuals who work actively within social media and have platforms and communities of their own on blogs, Twitter, posterous, etc., often post significant ideas online long before they commit them to an academic format. They then open themselves to input and comment from what is colloquially known as the 'wisdom of crowds' model, which has been the subject of some overt studies in comparison to peer review (Anderson, 2006). Peer review still has its place of privilege within the academic study of digital literacies. But it is no longer the sole mode of publishing nor the primary means by which the media and broader culture learn about the field.

Any literature review of social media and digital literacies needs also to be cognizant of whose literacies are being addressed. A sizable proportion of literature on digital literacies deals specifically with youth populations, thus tending to address slightly different literacies, including gaming, and to frame research differently from that of studies on adults. Work on youth literacies tends to focus more on constraints imposed by schools, programs, families, and other systems operating in the lives of youth, and also reflects cultural perceptions surrounding youth and technology. The notion of the

'digital native' (Prensky, 2001), which suggests that young people use technologies in an inherently different manner from older generations, has carried extensive cultural capital throughout the first decade of the 21st century. Though the idea that age is the primary factor in determining digital propensities has been refuted (Nasah, DaCosta, & Seok, 2010) and alternate conceptions proposed to account for differences in usage (White, 2008), this and other popular assumptions about technology and culture still inform the literature. In this research study, however, participants' age was not asked for. The validity of the 'digital native' concept seemed unlikely to have relevance for the study, as anecdotal information from the 2 MOOC facilitators on the UPEI research team suggested that the vast majority of participants in MOOCs to date have been adult professionals. Neither of the MOOC facilitators could recall a participant in any MOOC who was known to be an undergraduate student or younger (G. Siemens & D. Cormier, personal communication, October 3rd, 2010).

Howard Rheingold's work on social media literacies is perhaps the best-known in the field today. In 2007, Rheingold and Robin Good released a series of online articles on the importance of teaching youth to communicate and organize using visual, participatory media. Rheingold denies the 'digital native" concept and focuses on literacies as abilities that must be both taught and practiced. He emphasizes five key literacies as central to what he calls effective being in digital culture: attention, participation, collaboration, network awareness, and critical consumption (Rheingold, 2007). For Rheingold, these are all interconnected, and mastery of any one is not so important as being able to pull them all together. He addresses each in the context of learning. Attention represents awareness and mindfulness of what one attends to, but also the notion of "continuous partial attention" (Stone, L., 2010, unpaginated) or the networked mind that is always on, attempting to miss as little as possible. Rheingold's work on attention exemplifies one of the central themes in literature on social media literacies, which is that behaviours traditionally considered negative may have value outside of institutional settings such as schools. The MOOC questionnaire emphasized the literacies of

participation, collaboration, and network awareness more so than attention or critical consumption, as within a MOOC environment the materials presented are all at least nominally relevant and on topic. It was assumed that if a MOOC participant were adept in the three emphasized literacies, neither attention nor critical consumption would dramatically impact his or her experience of the MOOC.

Clay Shirky's work has focused particularly on the social and economic effects of peer-to-peer and wireless networks, and thus of social media practices and literacies. He has particularly focused on sharing as the key literacy and possibility of social media. Shirky's 2008 book, *Here Comes Everybody*, explored the notion of crowdsourcing, or collaborative participation in the creation and authorization of knowledge. This concept was taken up under the somewhat different moniker of "produsage" in 2007 by Axel Bruns: in both, social media represent a paradigm shift in the ways users relate to the content they also consume. On Twitter, on blogs, on Flickr, and in Wikipedia, people are contributing their own writing, photographs, and ideas to a broad pool of work for which they are also the audience. In MOOCs, participants contribute their perspectives and feedback to a knowledge-building conversation in which they they are also the student population. The MOOC operates as a medium of sharing, and operates most richly when learners engage as agents, connecting and collaborating. It is a produsage environment. In this study, MOOC participants' prior social media literacies were represented in part by their reported comfort level with sharing and interacting with work in progress.

Danah Boyd's work on social media literacies has focused on how youth use particular social media spaces and networks. In reviewing the cultural practices and values reflected in platforms such as Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook, Boyd was one of the first theorists to analyze social media communities in terms of race, class, and social belonging categories (2006). Her work explores the problem of homophily, or the tendency of people to affiliate with those like them, in a world where people expect increasing choice over whom they associate with (Boyd, 2009). Little comparable research has yet been done on the adult social media populations that dominate MOOCs. As the

associations formed in MOOCs are always voluntary, they would make an ideal site in which to study homophily in adult populations.

This issue of increased expectation of choice permeates the literature on social media literacies. In 2006, Mary Kalantzis, who had long been involved with literacies and digital literacies work, wrote a paper calling for a rethinking of pedagogy in light of the social transformations affecting subjectivity, diversity, and the "means of production of meaning" (Kalantzis, 2006, p. 7). Her work suggested that constructivism was an inadequate pedagogical foundation to deal with the challenges of agency that digital subjectivities bring into the classroom. Kalantzis instead emphasized reflexivity and fragmentation as the governance structures operating within digital networks, and explored how particular governance structures enable learners to be agents of knowing. Agency is a complex literacy that the diffuse and decentralized MOOC structure rewards and relies on, in learners.

George Siemens and Stephen Downes developed the pedagogy of connectivism in order to address some of constructivism's limitations for the digital era (Siemens, 2006). In 2006, Siemens published *Knowing Knowledge*, in which he outlined connectivism as a learning theory for the digital era. Connectivist learning is about network creation and the capacity to distinguish between important and unimportant information in a constantly fluid environment. In 2008, Siemens and Downes facilitated the first MOOC, Connectivism and Connectivist Knowledge (CCK08). CCK08 focused on connectivist principles and provided an opportunity to extend the theory into practice (McAuley et al, 2010). Because MOOCs utilize social media platforms rather than closed, course-specific virtual classrooms, they make it possible for learners to build real-life networks that extend and persist beyond course boundaries. MOOCS also distribute responsibility for learning. Siemens emphasizes that in the digital age, "the learner is the teacher is the learner" (Siemens, 2006, p. 42), and suggests that it is changes in the structure of knowledge itself that make digital learning different from more traditional models. To date, either Siemens, Downes, or both have been part of the facilitation team of each

MOOC offered (McAuley et al, 2010).

Dave Cormier's (2008) concept of community as curriculum, which applies Deleuze & Guattari's (1981) rhizomatic model to learning, offers a way to incorporate social media literacies into instructional design. In Cormier's work, the rhizome represents a model for distribution of knowledge in community contexts and other environments where traditional gatekeeping structures of organization and validation may not be required, replicable, or desirable. Rhizomatic learning allows a digital community to dispense with predetermined knowledge distribution structures, and therefore with external validation of the knowledge created within and for the community. Likewise, a MOOC's purpose is to be valuable for and because of the people involved in it, not on the terms of any external curriculum or accrediting body. Cormier's work shaped the construct of value utilized in the MOOC study.

Methods

Questionnaire Development

A draft questionnaire was prepared based on discussions by the UPEI SSHRC research team for the MOOC project. The one MOOC available for study in the fall of 2010 was Personal Learning Environments Network Knowledge 2010 (PLENK 2010). The instructors and research team of PLENK 2010 were approached for permission to carry out the study as one of the course's research initiatives; the study was accepted. The PLENK 2010 research team, which included 5 scholars based at universities in Canada, the United States, and Australia, and 3 representatives of the Canada Research Council, contributed feedback on the draft questionnaire. Items were rephrased for increased specificity, particularly regarding social media practices. Dave Cormier and George Siemens (see Literature Review above) were both members of the UPEI MOOC research team, and facilitators of the PLENK 2010 course which provided the sample for this study. Dr. Tess Miller of UPEI also assessed the questionnaire and her suggestions were incorporated to increase clarity.

The questionnaire focused on participants' reported social media literacies and engagement prior to the course, and on the value they reported experiencing from the MOOC. The 19 questions were primarily of selected response format; however, three questions allowed participants to provide a written response. No identifying or demographic information was requested. The questionnaire used a 5 point Likert scale.

Questionnaire Distribution

Data was collected via online questionnaire using Survey Monkey. An invitation to complete the questionnaire was communicated to PLENK 2010 learners in two ways: on Twitter using the PLENK #2010 hashtag and via the Online Learning Daily newsletter that serves as the PLENK 2010 regular news update. Since PLENK 2010 was the sole MOOC offered in the fall of 2010, the survey had the potential to be a census of all active MOOC participants at that time. However, because notification was embedded in mass communications rather than sent directly to individual participants many might have not received the invitation to complete the questionnaire. The link to the questionnaire was open for a week. See appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire.

Descriptive Statistics

Forty participants responded to the questionnaire representing 2.9% of the PLENK 2010 population. Using PASW-18, the frequencies, means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis for all items were checked for normal distribution.

Inferential Statistics

Factor Analysis

Although Spearman recommends a sample size of 100 for factor analysis (Bonett & Wright, 2000), this was a pilot project aimed at guiding further study. Therefore factor analysis was still

conducted to examine how well the four items used to represent the construct of reported value fit together.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to see whether a correlation existed between participants' reported social media literacies before PLENK 2010 and the value they reporting experiencing in the course. Reported engagement with social media practices was determined using a combination of 4 questions. This group of items was summed together to create a variable called Prior Engagement Code 2, in which participants were grouped into those who were highly engaged in social media practices and literacies and those who were not. Although this variable was based on participant's responses, it was used in this study as an independent variable upon which the construct was tested. To check for equality of variance, Levene's test was used.

The F-ratio or variance was tested by means of the Brown-Forsythe and Welsh tests for equality of group variances. A Means Plot was also generated. No Post-Hoc or Tukey test was conducted because the variable had fewer than three groups.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

The ends of the raw data tended to peak more than the middle on items related to Twitter use and number of course interactions. Data was skewed heavily to the left on 5 items, and to the right on 3 items. This suggested the data might have been bimodal if the scale had been greater than five points. The 9 items related to frequency of use for specific social media platforms were excluded from analysis and reserved to inform future MOOC research. The written-response question on preferred mode of course interaction was also excluded from analysis. The remaining 8 items were grouped and summed to comprise the independent and dependent variables.

The four questions used to determine social media literacies among MOOC participants focused on reported level of engagement, comfort with online practices of sharing, and size of network prior to the MOOC. Descriptive statistics for these four items are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Raw data of items used to create independent variable

	Not Engaged				Highly engaged		
Question	1	2	3	4	5	*M*	*SD*
Prior engagement in social media	2	5	10	12	2	3.5	0.93
	Not Comfortable				Very Comfortable		
Question	1	2	3	4	5	*M*	*SD*
Comfort sharing own draft work	4	3	9	26	8	3.5	1.2
	Not Comfortable				Very Comfortable		
Question	1	2	3	4	5	*M*	*SD*
Comfort interacting with others' draft work	1	4	7	12	16	3.95	1.11
	1-50	51-300	301-800	801-3000	3000+		
Question	1	2	3	4	5	*M*	*SD*
Size of prior network	16	13	5	3	2	2.03	1.16

Based on a two factor solution for the engagement construct (see Table 2 below), items falling into each factor were summed together to create one variable for the purpose of increasing the power of analysis. Responses from 1 to 3 were recoded as a 1, and responses from 4 to 5 recoded as a 2. After recoding, the two groups were similar in size ($N = 21$, Low-engaged, $N = 19$, High-engaged).

Table 2: Engagement construct, or independent variable

			95% Confidence Interval for Mean		
Factors	*M*	*SD*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	N
Low Engaged	3.62	0.88	3.22	4.02	21
High Engaged	4.03	0.62	3.73	4.32	19
Total	3.81	0.79	3.56	4.06	40

Inferential Statistics

Factor Analysis

The four items in the value construct of the questionnaire were subjected to a principal component factor analysis (FA). Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed four coefficients of 0.3 or higher. The Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin value was 0.715, higher than unacceptable range (Pett, Lackey, & Sullivan, 2003). A large value was obtained in Bartlett's test of sphericity with a statistical significance of $p = 0.000$. FA revealed the existence of a single component with an eigenvalue exceeding 1, explaining 59.56% of the variance. The scree plot revealed a clear break after the first component. This suggests that the four items in the construct fit together well as a scale.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Levene's statistic for homogeneity of variance between the two factors of the independent variable was 3.59 ($p = 0.066$), so equal variances can be assumed.A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of reported prior social media literacies and engagement (grouped into low and high engagement) on the value participants reported experiencing in a MOOC. A difference in means between the groups was observed in the expected direction. However, the ANOVA revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference between groups ($F = (1, 38) 2.802$, $p = 0.102$ at the $p < .05$ level).

Discussion

Findings revealed that prior engagement in social media literacies and practices does not have a statistically significant impact on MOOC participants' perceptions of value within the course. The null hypothesis could not be disproved.

In general, however, the difference in means between the groups identified as having high and low engagement with social media prior to the course did follow the expected pattern. Participants who had low levels of prior engagement did report lower value from the MOOC experience, just not to a significant extent.

This finding indicates that with appropriate alterations to the study, further research into the hypothesis may be warranted. If another MOOC is offered in the future, and that MOOC's research team is open to another examination of prior social media literacies within its population, the following changes would be recommended for such a study.

First, in order to be able to conduct a proper factor analysis (FA), a sample size of at least 100 is required (Bonett & Wright, 2000). In order to maximize a study's sample size within a future MOOC, the questionnaire should be embedded in the online registration process. This would capitalize on early enthusiasm and the large registration numbers that MOOCs have tended to engender. It would also allow the constructs of the study to be separated and the independent variable of social media literacies and engagement to be identified first. The study would be re-designed as a longitudinal survey, with a post-test on the value construct.

Dividing the questionnaire into a pre- and a post-test would separate the high engaged and low engaged groups early on in the research process. In the present study, moderately engaged participants were factored in with those whose engagement may, in fact, have been significantly lower. Separating

the two groups and leaving the moderately engaged group out of the post-test might have an impact on the significance of the suggested second study. Only those participants identified as high-engaged or low-engaged would be asked to complete a second short survey on MOOC value at the end of the course.

Additionally, though the constructs for engagement and value were developed in alignment with the literature on social media literacies, and with the guidance of the MOOC research team, one item in particular requires revision. Responses to the question on size of prior network skewed heavily to the right, with 29 out of the 40 respondents choosing a 1 or 2 on that item. The numerical options given were chosen based on the networks of the MOOC and PLENK 2010 research teams: the intent was to allow for meaningful distinctions in network size. Instead, the numbers were clearly too high and did not match the networks of most participants, thus skewing the data. Network ranges should perhaps be scaled back to 1-25, 26-50, 51- 150, 151-500, and 500+ on a future questionnaire.

Factor analysis showed this instrument to have a strong value construct, with a single eigenvalue. Still, it was simply a pilot developed for learning purposes, and does not possess demonstrated reliability and validity. If future research into MOOCs were able to build upon the engagement constructs of other, validated social media studies, this might offer more certain insights into whether prior literacies and engagement do actually impact satisfaction and value.

While this study does not and cannot prove that participants' digital literacies have no effect on the value they experience in MOOCs, it does suggest a number of potentially valuable insights for MOOC researchers. First, responses within the value construct were higher than any of the UPEI MOOC research team had anticipated. This could be the result of participant self-selection, since the questionnaire was voluntary and people who did not value the experience may have chosen not to complete it or may have ceased their involvement in the course by the time the survey went out. However, it may also reflect genuine value of the MOOC experience, even for participants who are not

overly active in the course. In the study, 8 respondents claimed to have contributed 5 or fewer posts and comments to the course, a very minimal level of participation. Yet all responses to the final item of the questionnaire on future MOOC participation were neutral (3) or higher, with 16 out of 39 respondents choosing "very likely" to participate again. Participants with low contribution in a given MOOC cannot be assumed to be uninterested or displeased with the experience. MOOCs offer agency and intrinsic investment to participants (McAuley et al, 2010), and this may result in perceptions of value even where participation is minimal.

Other factors may perhaps be equally important in determining value. Perhaps it is not social media literacies but other as-yet-unidentified factors that shape the way participants perceive value in their MOOC experiences. The PLENK 2010 MOOC was heavily researched, with four separate surveys – including this one – developed and distributed through the research team. Hopefully the influx of interest in how MOOCs operate will contribute to increased understanding of what makes a MOOC valuable to participants.

In the meantime, however, the non-significant result of this study is likely to be taken as a positive by MOOC facilitators and researchers fielding investment interest in the model. UPEI's MOOC research was developed in response to the Government of Canada's Consultation Paper on the Digital Economy, and emphasizes the flexibility of the MOOC model for educating a digital citizenry. This study suggests that MOOCs may potentially be valuable even to populations without existing digital literacies, which would serve to enhance the model's flexibility and usefulness for mass education. Currently, government and business interests are in talks with facilitators about the model, and while this study cannot be used to conclude that existing social media literacies do *not* impact value, its particularities suggest at least that people without large pre-existing digital networks can find MOOCs valuable. As a tentative premise from which to go forward with MOOC development, this study has, then, been valuable.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that prior social media literacies and engagement do not have a significant impact on the value experienced by participants in Massive Open Online Courses. Though the means of the low-engaged and high-engaged groups did differ in the expected direction, there was no statistical significance to the difference. Nonetheless, the data suggested that participants – at least in this survey – do value MOOC experiences. Further research will be required to investigate which factors in a MOOC actually impact participants perceptions of value, and how the MOOC model can be utilized effectively and meaningfully across broad populations.

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