Going to College Online? A PEST Analysis of MOOCs

Abstract
Massively open? College unbound? No physical universities in a decade? Unbundling education? Doomed to pedagogical collapse? What are the roots of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and how much of a trend is it? What promises and anxieties do MOOCs bring to higher education and university administrators and faculty? The past year has witnessed one of the most rapid and enthusiastic adoptions of educational innovation in history, generating numerous discussions on an endless list of questions and issues related to MOOCs and open educational resources.

In order to better understand the recent boom in MOOCs and its broad implications, it may be time for a PEST analysis. The PEST framework is used to scan the macro environment through Political, Economic, Social, and Technological lenses. It has been used in various settings, particularly business and industry to determine organizational status, potential and direction, and strategic planning. The framework is suitable for the analysis of MOOCs, especially given how modern higher education and today’s macro-environmental milieus are so intertwined.

Political Trends
Political trends indicate how and to what degree the government might intervene in the process of a cause. Consequently, it is important to consider fundamental questions: What is the federal or state government position on MOOCs? Will government policy influence laws that regulate or help MOOCs thrive or the opposite? Can the goods and services, which the government wants to provide, extend to MOOCs? There are no ready answers to these questions; this is partly due to the nascent nature of MOOCs, and partly because the pace of its growth has been so rapid. However, politicians, eager to solve key problems plaguing in higher education, may influence the trajectory of MOOCs.

Economic Trends
The sluggish economy has compounded issues in higher education, such as the upsurge in textbook costs, increasing college tuition, a rise in student debt, and lower retention and graduation rates. Understandably, college students increasingly expect their universities to offer alternatives to expensive textbooks, an affordable education, and the flexible delivery of courses. Will MOOCs slow down the rising cost of college and make higher education more affordable? It certainly has the potential to do so.

Social Trends
A social trend that leads to the success of MOOCs is the increasingly flatter world and the public desire to become a global citizen. Thanks to advanced technologies, learners are eager to engage collaboratively and network globally. A desire to learn through social media can now be accommodated through affordable technology like never before. As such, new educational opportunities are expected to expand beyond the bricks-and-mortar university and national borders to embrace the flexibility and agility in the knowledge acquisition process.

Technological Trends
Technological factors are numerous and constantly changing. There are three notable technological factors that impact MOOCs.
The first notable technological trend is the impact advanced technology has had not only on shaping how a MOOC course is designed, taught, learned, and assessed, but also the “new issues” it continues to generate. The second notable technological trend is that as institutions strive for efficiency, productivity, and improvement, many institutional leaders are compelled to think about the twin subjects – (1) cost and productivity and (2) the potential of technology-mediated online education to alleviate the problem. The third technological trend that impacts MOOCs is that educators have and will continue to ask a fundamental question: in addition to accomplishing that which you previously could not, what real differences can MOOCs make to meaningful teaching and learning?

**Conclusion**
This presentation will use a PEST framework to examine macro environments that help participants understand the root of MOOCS and the trend of it. The presenter will not just introduce the topic passively. Instead, participants will be engaged during the presentation to discuss how MOOCs affect them and their institutions as faculty, students, higher education leaders, and educational professionals such as instructional designer and multimedia developer.