



Integrating MOOC in Joint European Master's Degree in Digital and Social Media Marketing

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Abstract

The research in five EU countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania, Poland and the UK) under the Erasmus Joint European Master's Degree in Search and Social Media Marketing (JEMSS) project identified students' needs and preferences in attaining digital marketing knowledge and skills. Most of them expect from a joint degree a good blend of strategic knowledge and creativity combined with understanding of content development and search engine optimization. International experience, work on real-life company projects, innovative teaching and learning are considered as major advantages of the joint degree.

The pilot Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on the iversity.org platform provided students and a larger audience with the opportunity to test learning of digital and social media marketing in a new way. The course was developed with a focus on the buyer persona. It involves theoretical knowledge, the experience of the large company leaders as well as the implementation of the digital marketing by agencies and manufacturing SMEs in the five project countries. The MOOC attracted more than fourteen thousand participants from all over the world and proved the need of new approaches to teaching and learning. Students' interest and positive feedback allow the development of professional MOOC focused more on digital marketing strategy design and measuring the return on investment.

Despite the success, the integration of a MOOC in a regular bachelor or master degree studies remains a challenge. Most of the universities in partner countries are not yet ready to accept MOOC as a separate course in the programmes and give credits for it. MOOC is perceived rather as a tool than a full-fledged course. For the joint European programme curriculum in digital and social media marketing the barriers are even higher. MOOCs are innovative disruptors of the traditional learning. Building awareness on MOOC among European universities will allow them to integrate gradually the new way of teaching and learning and will help them avoid the negative consequences of the digital disruption.

1. Introduction

Joint European degree programmes are a major form of the higher education internationalization. They have been always high in the European political agenda. [1] Joint degrees offer cross-cultural experience which is indispensable in the globalized world. However, the research in the last decade revealed the complexity of implementing this form of international cooperation. It stems mainly from the differences in the national legislation. [2]

JEMSS project is funded by the European Commission under the Long-life Learning Programme and includes academic and business partners from five EU countries³. The project goal is to research students and companies needs in attaining digital marketing expertise and to create an attractive joint European Master's degree programme.⁴ Most of the students expect from a joint degree a good blend of strategic knowledge and creativeness combined with understanding of content development and

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³ JEMSS is a European Union funded project part of the Erasmus Lifelong Learning programme. The project is aligned with the European agenda 2020 which recognises the need for digital literacy skills and aims to develop a Joint European Masters in Digital and Social Media Marketing. The JEMSS project is managed by an international consortium of leading EU universities- The University of Salford (UK), University of National and World Economy (UNWE) (Bulgaria), University of Sheffield, international faculty CITY College (Greece), Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania), University of Lodz (Poland) and expert digital marketing recruitment agency - Candidate Ltd (UK). For more information visit <http://mastersindigitalmarketing.org/> or Join JEMSS on Facebook and Twitter to become involved in the #passion4digital community

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search engine optimization. International experience, work on real-life company projects, innovative teaching and learning are considered as major benefits from the joint degree programme. It has to combine both the traditional educational tools like an original textbook, case studies on companies practice and internship schemes and mass open online courses (MOOCs). A major challenge in the curriculum development is MOOC integration as a separate comprehensive course.

2. Why include MOOC in the Joint European Master's Degree Programme?

MOOCs appeared as a disruptive innovation for the traditional higher education. They are an emerging field of teaching and learning, and the universities are still experimenting with them. The technological platforms like EdX, Coursera, Udacity, etc. are researching comprehensively students' consumer journey and the learning process.

MOOC major advantage is cost reduction of education since one course is attended by a greater number of students than the traditional class. Lectures can be divided into smaller sections that are more focused on a set of issues. Students can study according to their own speed of learning and can access the course from different locations. The interaction with live instructors adds to course success [3].

MOOC limitation is the different background of students which complicates the decisions about the level of complexity and speed of the course. Due to the different knowledge of the participants the peer evaluation is often not trusted. There is also a high dropout rate for many of the courses. [4] MOOC creation and running is time-consuming and requires the involvement of many experts. Researchers point out that the focus on dissemination of knowledge through MOOC may deteriorate the ability of the academia to create new knowledge.[5]

The pilot MOOC course in JEMSS was planned to create an innovative learning material on digital and social media marketing. It aimed also to test it among a large international audience by giving access to anyone interested in the subject.. Therefore it needed an interesting content. The pilot course was an opportunity to examine also the partners' collaboration in developing the MOOC teaching videos, assignments, quizzes, exams as well as in running the course and supporting the discussion board. The partnering universities had a different level of MOOC proficiency. While the project leader the University of Salford had already a good experience in this type of education, for the other university partners the area was very new. Designing the introductory course, the partners had to reflect on all the specific characteristics of the new educational channel.

The JEMSS project approach to MOOC was to connect the participants and involve them in joint work as well as to develop the learning units as evolving material.. Based on the classification the project MOOC can be described more as "xMOOC" than "cMOOC".[6]

Video creation was a major challenge in MOOC preparation. It had to be based on the existing body of knowledge in digital and social media marketing, the partners' teaching experience and practical examples of agencies and small and medium sized companies in the five partner countries. The pilot course had to be tested as an introductory learning tool but it had also to attract more experienced audience to assess its knowledge and decide to continue its studies in a Joint European Master's Degree. The MOOC had to be created also in accordance with the JEMSS project textbook on digital and social media marketing and serve either as an addition to it or as a pre-requisite for a degree programme.

The introductory MOOC was delivered on the digital learning platform for higher education and professional development iversity.org. Its duration was six weeks and it included six learning units and a final exam. It was free of charge and only the students that wanted to acquire a certificate had to pay a promotional price.

3. JEMSS MOOC Results: lessons learned

Digital and social media marketing is an attractive area for MOOC. The students enrolled in the course were more than 14,000 from all over the world. The reasons for taking the course were different. Some of the students' comments in the post-course survey are: *"I am about to turn on a new path on my professional carrier in Marketing and every course is really helping in achieving the background I don't have now"; "It gave me the chance to update my skills."; "I needed to add more knowledge on social media marketing"; "As a recent graduate and single mother...it is a daily challenge to balance work and life activities. The course although not directly linked to my area of expertise, covered the topics I require in improving weaknesses in my knowledge..."*

A lesson learned from MOOC is that the openness of the online courses allows gaining a variety of benefits for the students' professional improvement and the business development. The course was



“Hopefully helpful in interacting and hiring a Digital Marketing services/consultant for my very small business”; “I am the Acting National Union of Mineworkers spokesman in South Africa....We want to develop Digital Social Media Strategy and this course will definitely help me do that”; “It was very helpful for my daily business and I got some useful insights for the future”; “I feel more confident for my CV...I can watch on the internet more conscious..”; “I gained blogging experience...” For some students the course revealed the fact that digital marketing is an exciting area but is not appropriate for their professional carrier: *“Well, I have discovered that I am not a digital marketer”*.

Most of the comments on MOOC are positive but there are also many detailed suggestions. They concern the peer evaluation, the time needed for homework preparation, the insertion of the additional materials in the quizzes, supplementary written support to the videos, the opportunity to go back to the course and review the material. *“The least effective aspect of this MOOC I felt was the sharing and social dialogue elements.”*; *“The quizzes were a bit too easy”*; *“More references to books, papers, sites”*; *“extend the videos to almost proper lectures”*; *“some of the reference material was outdated”* and *“live tutor interaction is needed”*. While expressing their satisfaction with the international experience in digital marketing, the participants required transcripts for video units in order to grasp easier the agencies and the companies representatives’ ideas.

Digital and social media marketing course confirmed some of the general MOOC disadvantages identified in previous research papers on the topic. The development of the international course was time consuming and required a lot of expert skills beyond those that the marketing educators possess. The implementation of the course also needed a lot of time in order to deepen the discussion on the topic. Coordination of an international team to put into practice an innovative teaching idea proved to be a challenging task.

The dropout rate was also high. It proved that democratizing of the education does not necessarily mean that students are taking a course for certificate even if it is offered with a substantial discount. Developing a business model for capturing value from the potential customers requires additional research. The regular updating of the course is another challenge in the dynamically changing field.

The attempt to include MOOC as a full-fledge course that is accepted for credit at partners’ universities turned out to be a difficult decision. Though they have experience in distant learning, the idea of integrating MOOC as a separate subject in the Joint European Master’s Degree on Digital and Social Media Marketing seemed too pioneering. All partner universities prefer to use it in a blended mode with the traditional type of teaching and learning.

Conclusion

MOOCs add variety to the modern learning tools. The participation of an international team in its development and implementation contributes to the attractiveness of the content and the interactive learning. Its integration in the Joint European Master’s Degree in Digital and Social Media Marketing fully corresponds to the area of study. It is difficult to imagine a digital marketing learning process without such digital learning tool. However, the traditional educational ecosystems as well as the MOOC disadvantages like the high rate of dropouts, the students’ cognitive variety and the measurement of the learning results mainly by completion rates are major obstacles for accepting digital and social media marketing MOOC for academic credit. The decision seems even more difficult for a Joint Degree Programme which faces many differences in the national legislation. MOOC will be part of the blended learning on digital marketing and will be used more as a pre-requisite for class discussions and assignments. The invaluable experience of the JEMSS project team provides the basis for the development of new and more sophisticated MOOC courses at project partners’ universities.

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