Encouraging Forum Participation in Online Courses with Collectivist, Individualist, and Neutral Motivational Framings

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Motivation

Today’s xMOOCs:
• Instructionism
• Individualized learning

Learning Sciences:
• Learning with others supports deeper learning [e.g., Brown & Cocking, ‘00; Stahl et al., ‘06]
  – Articulate ideas, learn through teaching, etc.
Motivation

Where is social learning in MOOCs?

Facebook & Twitter -- HELP or HURT to an Organization?

In today's digital world, most companies and organizations have Facebook and Twitter pages. While this can reach millions of people worldwide, do you think this helps or hurts an organization?

That depends on the nature of the business the company is conducting and the manner of which these social media sites are used. However, speaking generally, I believe it helps an organization.

I believe this is quite a tricky one... In order for social media to help an organization it really has to be used in a sensible way, and there should be someone (or a team if the org is big enough) managing all of this. It's important to know the rules of these sites and know what you can and cannot post about your organization, because if not well taken care of, Facebook or Twitter can be perjudicial to the business and do more harm than good. But overall, if well managed, it should be a platform to help the organization.
Discussion Forums

Promote deeper learning, create cohesion & trust  [Garrison et al., ‘99]

Associated with overall course engagement  [Kizilcec et al., ‘13]

Positive feedback loop

Encourage Forum Participation
Motivating Participation

Component of final grade?

External reinforcement tends to undermine intrinsic motivation [Deci, ‘71, ‘99]

Better use positive feedback

Increase salience, spark intrinsic motivation
Motivating Participation

Relevance to audience  [Rothman & Salovey, '97; Grant & Hofmann, '11]

Motivations for community involvement  [Batson et al., '02]

– Individualism
– Altruism
– Collectivism
– Principalism
Study Design & Predictions
Study Design

Two Randomized Field Experiments

General Encouragement
Sample: All learners (n = 3,907)
Course Topic: Computer Science
Conditions: Neutral, Collectivist, Individualist

Targeted Encouragement
Sample: No forum participation by week 3 (n = 7,522)
Course Topic: Sociology
Conditions: Control, Neutral, Collectivist, Individualist

Course Start
Course End (8 weeks)

In Week 1

In Week 3

Course Start
Course End (11 weeks)
Hello [Student Name] –

This is a quick note to encourage you to contribute to the discussion board.

The discussion boards were created to **supplement the viewing of videos** and the completion of work. They are available through the internet. There are a number of posts on the discussion board. Students can enter the discussion board at any time and can contribute for the duration of the course. **The more people participate, the more posts there are on the discussion board.**

**Take part!**

Best,

[Instructor Name]
Individualist Encouragement

Hello [Student Name] –

This is a quick note to encourage you to contribute to the discussion board.

We are all trying to get as much from this course as we can and develop a deeper understanding of organizations. There are a number of lively posts on the discussion board, and contributing to them is a great way to learn. Students can enter the discussion board at any time, and can contribute for the duration of the course. The more people participate, the more they learn.

Jump in!

Best,

[Instructor Name]
Hello [Student Name] –

This is a quick note to encourage you to contribute to the discussion board.

We are all working together to develop a deeper understanding of organizations. There are a number of lively conversations on the discussion forum, and contributing to them is a great way to share your experiences and perspectives with others. Students can enter the discussion forum at any time, and can contribute for the duration of the course. The more people participate, the more we all learn together.

Join us!

Best,

[Instructor Name]
Hypotheses & Research Question

\( \mathcal{H}_1: \) More forum participation in collectivist & individualist group than neutral or control

\( \mathcal{H}_2: \) Lower attrition in collectivist & individualist group than neutral or control

\( \text{RQ:} \) Is a collectivist or individualist framing better for encouraging forum participation?
General Encouragement

Findings & Interpretations
General Encouragement

1 Week After Intervention

- Neutral
- Collectivist
- Individualist

10 Weeks After Intervention

- Neutral
- Collectivist
- Individualist

Proportion Who Contribute

1% 2% 3% 4% 5% 6% 7%

Average Number of Contributions

- Individualist: 2.6x
- Collectivist: 1.7x
- Neutral: 2.3x

Significance Levels:
- *<0.1
- **<0.05
- ***<0.01
General Encouragement

Discouraging participation

1 Week After Intervention

Proportion Who Contribute

10 Weeks After Intervention

Average Number of Contributions

Among Contributing Participants

* < 0.1, ** < 0.05, *** < 0.01
General Encouragement

Consistent trends

Weeks After Intervention

Average Number of Contributions

Proportion Remaining Users

Neutral Collectivist Individualist

Same attrition
General Encouragement

Opposite than hypothesized in H1.

Inconsistent with prior work \[\text{e.g., Grant et al., '11, '12}\]

Possible Explanations?

• Too strong persuasion attempt \[\text{Feiler et al. '12}\]
• Extrapolation effect (marketing)
• Obedience & social desirability
Targeted Encouragement

Findings & Interpretations
Targeted Encouragement

1 Week After Intervention

- Control
- Neutral
- Collectivist
- Individualist

8 Weeks After Intervention

- Control
- Neutral
- Collectivist
- Individualist

Proportion Who Contribute

0% 1% 2% 3% 4% 5%
Targeted Encouragement

Discouraging participation

**<0.05, ***<0.01
Targeted Encouragement

Varying trends

9% higher attrition for neutral than baseline

(p=0.06)
Targeted Encouragement

Initially, as in study 1.
Later, less forum activity in collectivist condition (RQ).

Temporary boost from neutral reminder

Explanation of collectivist effect:
• Reminder of lack of belonging to community after forum inactivity
Concluding Remarks
Concluding Remarks

• Decision to participate in forum
• Neutral reminder
• Appeal to collectivist motivation maybe triggers resentment
Concluding Remarks

- Decision to participate in forum
- Neutral reminder
- Appeal to collectivist motivation maybe triggers resentment
- Intent-to-treat and policy decisions
- Repeat encouragements, personalization
- Positive reinforcement
Thank you

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