

# When the audience talks back: MOOCs and “super” discourse

Rob Grace, The Pennsylvania State University

Frederico Fonseca, The Pennsylvania State University

## Abstract

Opportunities for co-produced digital media find users differentially involved within emergent and unfamiliar configurations of technologies, organizations, and complex information flows. Addressing the interaction patterns and rhetorical practices of the most frequent contributors to online discussion forums in comparison to the majority of infrequent contributors, this analysis considers the contributions of each toward the structuring of online discourse. An empirical analysis found an inverse ratio between the monologues and replies of frequent contributors and those users posting a single comment. Although both groups tended to engage in interpretive practices, frequent contributors more often interacted in direct reply with others, often in sharp critique or supportive acknowledgement. These findings suggest that frequent contributors perform a significant role in the emergent structuring of online discourse.

**Keywords:** MOOC, user-generated content, online discourse, computer-mediated communication, sociomateriality

**Citation:** Grace, R., Fonseca, F. (2015). When the audience talks back: MOOCs and “super” discourse. In *iConference 2015 Proceedings*.

**Copyright:** Copyright is held by the authors.

**Contact:** wrg123@ist.psu.edu, ffonseca@ist.psu.edu

## 1 Introduction

Despite sustained interest, the emergent forms of participatory new media remain murky. As shifts in online media production now see digital audiences becoming content co-producers, our attention is directed to the emergent “artifact configurations” resulting from the convergence of users, media organizations, and technically-facilitated information flows that increasingly appear in protean forms across all areas of social life (Boczkowski, 2005).

New practices of user-generated content beg questions surrounding how artifact configurations emerge, in part, through the contributions of users and the character of the information flows circulating between them. Among the most common opportunities for user-generated content, discussion or comment forums adjoining online news media allow individuals to interact with spatio-temporally distributed peers, as well as extend their voice to prominent media outlets serving as public forums. Such opportunities draw together many and diverse perspectives to be placed in relation to media content in ongoing, dynamic configurations organized through user interaction, organized media production, and digital technologies.

Empirical analyses of online commenting offer an eclectic and often contradictory collection of perspectives on the character of these configurations. Generally, online discussion forums have been described as interactive spaces supporting individual self-expression and collective meaning construction (Canter, 2013, Lindgren, 2011) information sharing (Burnett & Buerkle, 2004), virtual community (Fayard & DeSanctis, 2010), civic debate (Dahlberg, 2001), and emotional support (Cunha and Orlikowski, 2008). The character of discussion in these spaces ranges from playful banter to deep expressions of sympathy and solidarity, considered deliberation to hostility, vitriol, and racist invective. A common feature of many forums, however, regards the extreme participation of a minority of users. Questions regarding the specific discourses and patterns of interaction of these users emerge as both intriguing and relatively unknown.

Recently, a particular class of users was labeled “superparticipants,” an active, even dominant, minority who frequently contribute to online discussion forums (Graham and Wright, 2014). Graham and Wright provide an insightful analysis and address a common yet rarely studied phenomenon of digital participation. The positive functions they identify regard concerns for equal access and participation, concerns addressing both “posting patterns and discursive practices” (p. 626). This analysis re-evaluates the function or practices of superparticipants by addressing two critical gaps left open in previous studies analyzing the relationship between user interaction patterns and user-generated content.

First, superparticipants have only been identified and analyzed according to the frequency and volume of their contributions (e.g. the number of comments posted to a forum). Their practices, however, cannot be understood as unique unless they are compared to those of less-frequently contributing users.

This analysis compares the practices of superparticipants with those of the majority of users who contribute only a single comment, allowing assessment of the potentially unique character of each.

Second, considering the discursive character of user interaction patterns entails analyzing how multiple, often contradictory articulations combine to enable and constrain meaning through emergent, situated configurations of online media. Graham and Wright abstract rhetorical practices (acknowledgment, argument, humor, ect) from the contexts in which they emerge as meaningful articulations. This analysis selects a single discursive field, the discussion of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) over a two year period in the comment forums of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and analyzes the ways in which both superparticipant and single poster interactions actively configure online discussions.

Thus this analysis responds to the following two questions: How do user interaction patterns vary between superparticipants and single posters, and how do these patterns contribute to the structuring of online discourse?

## 2 Literature Review

The superparticipant user has received widespread, albeit collateral, attention. Diverse empirical analyses have recognized the presence of a minority of users regularly posting multiple comments to online discussion forums (Coe, et al., 2014; Graham & Wright, 2014; Singer, 2009). Various findings have also described superparticipants as more civil than infrequent commenters (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014), characterized by regular sentiment patterns (Kim, et al., 2011), and exhibiting relationship patterns that resemble “an informal group without a clear hierarchy” (Burri, Baujard, & Etter, 2006, S15). Graham and Wright (2014) provide the only apparent analysis specific to frequent commenters. Their conclusions regarding the “positive function” of superparticipants follow Albrecht’s (2006), who writes that an active minority of users “‘behaved as 'old hands,' giving advice and providing other participants with an overview of the debate” (p. 72). According to Graham and Wright (2014), superparticipants “undertake a range of largely positive functions and roles within the forum, including helping other users; replying to debates and summarizing longer threads for new users; being empathetic towards others' problems; and engaging in (largely) rational critical debate”. (p. 638). Sketched thus, superparticipants would seem to perform distinct and critical roles structuring discussion in online comment forums.

The concept of the superparticipant has emerged elsewhere in studies of computer-mediated communication, notably those concerning online communities. Extending from Wenger and Lave’s (2003; Wenger, 1998) theorization of legitimate peripheral interaction as the process by which participation and identity change with increasing engagement in communities of practice, studies have examined the core membership of a practice: those participants who not only carry out leadership roles and extend legitimacy to and integrate new members, but represent the most active members of the community (Bryant, Forte, & Bruckman, 2005; Borzillo, Aznar, & Schmitt, 2011). Similarly, Huffaker (2010), while analyzing leaders emerging through online communication, concludes that “sheer communication activity is central to being influential” (p. 610).

Such individuals become central to organizing and defining a community through their discursive practices. In a case study of a company’s discussion forum, Cunha and Orlikowski (2008) find “an exceptionally active and expressive poster” that shaped employee discourses critical of corporate authorities and promoted employee solidarity by organizing shared, cathartic discussions (p. 142). Importantly, they find that this individual’s comments functioned as “collective artifacts” around which employees came to express their own personal experiences and feelings. Elsewhere, Fayard and DeSanctis (2010) describe the effects generated by a core group of participants within a discussion forum who established a pattern of discursive practices which served as context for community-formation, a sense of “we-ness” that the authors connect to enhanced participation and knowledge exchange (p. 410).

Correlation between the influence of a select group of participants and their level of communicative activity also bears out in analyses of online discussion networks. Analyzing interaction patterns on Usenet newsgroups, Himelboim (2009; 2011) finds a positive correlation between level of participation in discussion and the number of replies received. However, following the power-law distribution that commonly characterizes large networks, a select group of active participants receive a disproportionate number of replies, while the majority of participants receive very few (2011, p. 652). As a result of the tendency for reply distributions to skew as the scale of a discussion increases, Himelboim (2008) suggests that online discussions “are hierarchical and that a relatively small number of participants have control over the information that flows and the topics discussed” (p. 173). This conclusion finds support from Choi (2014) who identifies opinion leaders in Twitter networks who are distinguished

primarily by more frequent messaging than non-opinion leaders, and whose messages are vastly more re-distributed (retweeted) by others, while exhibiting high degree and flow betweenness centralities (p. 10).

Finally, in a network analysis of both health and political newsgroups, Himelboim (2008) compares the interaction patterns between participants engaged in different discourses. Finding variances in reply distribution, he suggests that “the structure of a discussion network is affected by the type of information exchanged within it” (p. 172). This echoes the findings of Kelly, Fisher, and Smith (2006), who describe how “macro-level structure arises and is maintained by micro-level discursive choices” (p. 412). The authors connect these discursive choices to group norms which establish topical relevance for online discussion forums. Finding that users communicate primarily across ideological divides, while ignoring those users whose discussions are deemed irrelevant, Kelly et al. trace these interaction patterns to identify emergent network structures that feature a bi-polar ideological core and a disconnected “fringe” (p. 416).

These studies provide insight into the relationship between superparticipants and online discourse as well as open important questions. While frequent communicative activity relates to important functions in organizing and maintaining online communities, the networked, structural features of computer-mediated communication have been assessed as facilitating the emergence of influential actors fulfilling these functions. Furthermore, the discursive character of interaction patterns suggests important relationships between the ongoing discussions of an online forum and the evolution of its structure. Returning to the questions posed in the introduction, exploring the differences between superparticipants and the majority of less active users, and the respective contributions of each to the emergent properties of an online discussion forum, this analysis provides insight into the particular role of superparticipants in structuring online discourse.

### 3 Theory

Three claims orient this analysis and also serve as working definitions of central concepts. First, the notions of discourse and articulation I borrow from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985): “we will call articulation any practice establishing relations among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice we will call discourse” (p. 105). The elements that might be articulated within a particular discourse are both material and semiotic, thus this sentence constitutes an articulation of both meaningful signs that are simultaneously material entities, whether in paper or digital form. The second claim, the notion of antagonism, also extends from Laclau and Mouffe (1985): “Antagonism... is a relation wherein the limits of every objectivity are shown” (p. 125). Antagonism can be understood as an articulated, constitutive difference. If the multiplicity of discourses within a discursive field might be differentiated along certain constitutive joints or fractures, these might be conceptualized as antagonisms delineating the discursive topologies of the comment forums.

The concept of antagonism relates to the framing of an ideological divide, in this analysis one between MOOC proponents and opponents. The concept of antagonism, however, understands that these two positions are not exclusive to each other, but rather constitutively bound. In this sense, if MOOCs are discussed only as cost-cutting, educationally-inferior surrogates for the traditional classroom, an antagonism is drawn that at once articulates the value of each form of instruction and, importantly, limits the scope of understanding of MOOCs to a surrogate, competing educational model. Blended or hybrid educational models for example, where MOOCs serve as a resource and supplement to traditional classrooms, lie outside the limit or frame of discourse that the antagonism understanding MOOC-as-surrogate allows. If an antagonism posits the limits of objectivity, accounting for the ongoing articulation and re-articulation of antagonisms in the comments of participants allows analysis of the ways in which the understanding of a social object, like the MOOC, becomes shaped, constrained, and reproduced through interactions in an online forum.

Lastly, antagonism directly relates to the concept of interaction espoused by Barad (2003), who writes that:

The notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual “interaction,” which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the “components” of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful. (p. 815)

In this sense, discourse, as described by Laclau and Mouffe, represents an articulated intra-action that delineates antagonisms (articulated, constitutive differences) as well as lends objectivity to its articulated elements. Although I will continue to speak of interaction rather than intra-action, I want to analyze online discourse as the “intra-actions” among users and between users and media such that these interactions perform an understanding of user-generated content (the comment), the emergent digital artifact configurations (online comment forums within news media), and the form of the individual user (the “superparticipant”) that results from the intra-actions translated within this discussion. Together these claims extend a material-semiotic approach, understood together as discursive, that attempts a heightened sensitivity to the materiality of meaning and recognizes such as an important approach in the analysis of socio-technical systems (Law, 2009; Sawyer & Jarrahi, 2014).

## 4 Method

In order to explore the interaction patterns in online discussion forums a tripartite approach was undertaken. First, a large, qualitative study of MOOC discourses in online news media provides the background of this particular analysis of superparticipants. Adopting a discourse theoretical approach utilizing grounded methodology, this analysis sought to evoke the myriad discourses present within a critical period of MOOC debate in online news media, articles devoted to MOOC issues within *The Chronicle of Higher Education* across the year of 2013. Though the details of this on-going project cannot be fully elaborated here, the qualitative, discourse analysis of the articles and discussion forums of *The Chronicle* provide a rich grounding from which to analyze the particular role superparticipants and single posters perform across these discussions.

This particular study expands the collected news articles and attendant comments to constitute a longitudinal sample, a period beginning June 6th, 2012 and ending June 13, 2014, thus covering the first two years of consistent news coverage accorded to MOOCs by *The Chronicle*. A total of 66 articles and a total of 3949 comments were collected. From these comments, the five most active posters were identified to compose the analyzed sample of superparticipants. Additionally, a sample of single posters (n=108), composed of two users randomly drawn from each of the 54 online newspaper articles commented on by at least one of the five analyzed superparticipants, composed a sample group against which the interaction patterns of superparticipants could be compared. The choice of single posters, who not only allow for a maximum differentiation from the defining attribute of superparticipants, is especially warranted given they represent both the mode of user postings (n=1) and also the majority of users contributing to the Chronicle over the sampled two-year period (51% compared to 49% as multi-posters). As such they represent a critical demographic for analyses of online discourse (Table 1).

Users	Comments	Articles	Monologues	Replies	Responses
ilhan2000	176	44	66 (37.5%)	110 (62.5%)	77 (43.8%)
aaron	94	17	16 (17%)	78 (24.8%)	46 (48.9%)
archman	105	35	58 (24.8%)	50 (75.2%)	42 (55.2%)
Henry Vandenburg	82	24	24 (29.3%)	58 (70.7%)	50 (61%)
Keith Williams	62	14	15 (24.2%)	47 (75.8%)	42 (67.7%)
Superparticipants (Avg)	104	27	29.4 (28.3%)	74.4 (71.7%)	54.6 (67.7%)
Single posters	108	54	82 (75.9%)	26 (24.1%)	49 (45.4%)

Table 1. User sample (superparticipants and single posters)

Having collected the described data, analysis took two forms. First, a quantitative analysis of the interaction patterns was performed in order to identify patterning in interaction form (comments as monologues, replies, and responses- replies received by the analyzed superparticipants and single posters that were directed to the comments they posted). Additionally, a content analysis of rhetorical practices following that performed by Graham and Wright (2014) was performed in order to compare findings and also to describe trends in interaction forms with which a discursive analysis might be conducted (Weber, 1990). Lastly, a qualitative, discourse analysis was conducted, relating the multiplicity of discourses evoked in the grounded analysis of *The Chronicle* data to those of the selected superparticipants and single posters, and their interaction patterns derived from the above quantitative and content analyses.

## 5 Analysis

The content analysis of rhetorical practices reveals distinct patterning within the online comment forums of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Of the 3949 comments collected from 54 newspaper comment forums, 1082 individual users posted comments with an approximately even divide between single posters (those who comment only once) and multi-posters (those commenting twice or more). Of the comments 39.3% were monologues, while 60.7% of the comments directly replied to those of other users. An active minority of users frequently posting comments, the so-called superparticipants, are clearly in evidence as 10% of the users (n=108) contributed over half (54.5%) of the total set of comments.

Immediately apparent, a nearly inverse ratio exists between single and multi-posters' monologue/reply ratio. Among multi-posters, the top five superparticipants analyzed exhibit a greater difference between monologues (28.3%) and replies (71.7%) while the sample of single posters analyzed remains nearly consistent (monologues = 75.9%; replies = 24.1%) with the totals for single users. That these figures between superparticipants and single posters are nearly inverse presents important consequences for the interaction patterns of each group, and their role in the discursive structuring of online discussions.

Turning to the distinct rhetorical practices performed by both superparticipants and single posters, both groups engaged in multiple practices corresponding to the findings of Graham and Wright (2014), however, practices of acknowledgment, argument, and interpretation feature as the primary practices of both groups. Importantly, superparticipants engaged in critical argument more frequently than single posters (25% vs. 8.3%) while the latter were more likely to provide personal anecdotes and request information. Both groups most often provided interpretive comments, with single users doing so slightly more frequently (Table 2).

Totals:	ilhan2000	aaron	archman	Henry Vandenburg	Keith Williams	Super-participants	Single Posters
Acknowledgment	21.6%	18.1%	12.4%	8.5%	32.3%	18.6%	13.9%
Argument	16.5%	26.6%	27.6%	39.0%	19.4%	25.8%	8.3%
Advice	11.4%	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	2.8%
Humor	0.6%	1.1%	3.8%	1.2%	3.2%	2.0%	0.0%
Interpretation	39.2%	36.2%	33.3%	29.3%	38.7%	35.3%	44.4%
Providing information	10.8%	3.2%	6.7%	2.4%	1.6%	4.9%	7.4%
Demeaning	0.0%	3.2%	12.4%	11.0%	1.6%	5.6%	0.9%
Personal	0.0%	8.5%	1.0%	6.1%	3.2%	3.8%	15.7%
Experience							
Requesting information	0.0%	3.2%	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	1.1%	6.5%

Table 2. Content analysis of rhetorical practices (totals)

In their respective forms of interaction, the rhetorical practices of superparticipants and single posters point toward significant variances in user behavior. Among monologues, interpretation features as the predominant practice of both groups, these comments primarily respond to the content of the news article heading the forum and offer a generalized re-articulation of the news content presented (Table 3). Significantly, this represents the primary activity of single posters. Superparticipants, however, inordinately post replies to other users (Table 4). Among replies both superparticipants and single posters primarily acknowledge, argue, or interpret, however the former are twice as likely to criticize the comments of others (32.6% vs. 15.4%). Lastly, in the responses offered by other users to the comments of superparticipants and single posters, a significant dualism presents itself in the majority of responses being either acknowledgments of support or argument (Table 5). These relate to the lack of replies offering qualified responses and indicative of the ideological divides present in the discussion forums, a finding linked to the primary antagonism structuring the discourse that will be explored below. The presence of this antagonism, revealed in responses to one superparticipant in particular, clearly demonstrates the patterning of interaction around the primary discursive antagonism present within the online comment forum.

Interaction:	ilhan2000	aaron	archman	Henry Vandenburg	Keith Williams	Super-participants	Single Posters
Monologues							

Acknowledgment	9.1%	0.0%	7.4%	16.7%	6.7%	8.0%	13.4%
Argument	6.1%	0.0%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2.7%	7.3%
Advice	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.7%	3.7%
Humor	0.0%	0.0%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%
Interpretation	59.1%	80.0%	74.1%	66.7%	93.3%	74.6%	51.2%
Providing information	12.1%	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	0.0%	3.3%	0.0%
Demeaning Personal Experience	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%
Requesting information	0.0%	20.0%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	4.7%	18.3%
Requesting information	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	0.0%	1.7%	6.1%

Table 3. Content analysis of rhetorical practices (Interaction: Monologues)

Interaction: Replies	ilhan2000	aaron	archman	Henry Vandenburg	Keith Williams	Super-participants	Single Posters
Acknowledgment	29.1%	21.8%	15.2%	12.1%	40.4%	23.7%	26.9%
Argument	22.7%	32.1%	34.2%	48.3%	25.5%	32.6%	15.4%
Advice	10.0%	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	0.0%
Humor	0.9%	1.3%	2.5%	1.7%	4.3%	2.1%	0.0%
Interpretation	27.3%	28.2%	20.3%	13.8%	21.3%	22.2%	30.8%
Providing information	10.0%	3.8%	7.6%	1.7%	2.1%	5.1%	3.8%
Demeaning Personal Experience	0.0%	3.8%	16.5%	13.8%	2.1%	7.2%	3.8%
Requesting information	0.0%	6.4%	0.0%	8.6%	4.3%	3.9%	11.5%
Requesting information	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	7.7%

Table 4. Content analysis of rhetorical practices (Interaction: Replies)

These findings present an interesting though superficial depiction of user behavior within online comment forums. Significant interaction patterns and rhetorical practices between superparticipants and single posters include: (1) the shared primary practice of interpretation, (2) the inverse ratio of monologues to replies between the two groups, and the (3) relative tendencies of superparticipants to argue or acknowledge others, while single users more often perform a broader array of practices. These findings, however, necessitate contextual elaboration within a qualitative, discursive analysis identifying the ways in which these interactive and rhetorical practices constitute articulations that enable and constrain meaning within the comment forums. Furthermore, analyzing these practices discursively allows an understanding of interaction patterning along lines of antagonism which the latter serves to perform and thus actively shape, maintaining discursive boundaries and contributing to the emergent structuring of the online discussion forums.

Interaction: Responses	ilhan2000	aaron	archman	Henry Vandenburg	Keith Williams	Super-participants	Single Posters
Acknowledgment	3.9%	45.7%	31.0%	36.0%	45.2%	32.4%	30.6%
Argument	50.0%	19.6%	43.1%	48.0%	23.8%	36.9%	38.8%
Advice	1.3%	0.0%	1.7%	2.0%	2.4%	1.5%	4.1%
Humor	5.3%	0.0%	5.2%	0.0%	2.4%	2.6%	2.0%
Interpretation	6.6%	17.4%	10.3%	2.0%	7.1%	8.7%	14.3%
Providing information	11.8%	6.5%	3.4%	2.0%	4.8%	5.7%	6.1%
Demeaning Personal Experience	15.8%	2.2%	0.0%	4.0%	4.8%	5.3%	2.0%
Requesting information	5.3%	6.5%	5.2%	4.0%	9.5%	6.1%	2.0%
Requesting information	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%

Table 5. Content analysis of rhetorical practices (Interaction: Responses)

## 5.1 Superparticipants and Single posters

The following qualitative reading invigorates the three significant interaction patterns revealed through the content analysis described above. Among the five analyzed superparticipants distinction is made between the first user, ilhan2000, and the remaining four, collectively labelled “the professoriate.” This distinction follows from the defining feature of the discourses articulated across the two year period analyzed in the Chronicle, what can be described as a primary antagonism, a difference constitutive of wider logics of equivalence that organize the multiple, disparate discourses and secondary antagonisms along an intelligible topology. Along this antagonism the unique functions respective to superparticipants as they differ from single posters, presented last, becomes similarly intelligible, and will be followed throughout this discussion.

### 5.1.1 The Dreamer

“MOOCs will die soon,” begins the first posting by ilhan2000, the most frequent commenter (n=176) throughout the two-year period in which prognostication and interpretation would feature as his forte (ilhan2000, 2012). This death sentence he later explains:

You do not understand what MOOCs is . MOOCs is an acronym created by marketing company Coursera . MOOCs are just an experiment . But unfortunately universities did not understand that and everybody tried to jump into bandwagon .Sure MOOCs will die . But meanwhile a new structure came up. ONLINE by elite universities such as MIT Harvard Stanford . They said it is free now but with a small fee later . Now edx progress very strongly toward to provide degrees too. Cost per person so low therefore they will charge a small fee too such as \$ 50-100 may be less . Then what Thrun said will be realised in 10 years not 50 years [sic]. (ilhan2000, 2013)

An earlier May respondent summarizes ilhan2000, or ilhan’s, general reception: “If this is satire, it’s brilliant. If it isn’t, no critic of MOOC-based learning could possibly make a better case against them” (david\_williard, 2013). In reading a sort of farcical, ESL prophecy portending a future of cheap, open online courses opening access to the most prestigious American universities, fellow commenters often easily dismiss such comments. Though acknowledging that “I am a dreamer,” his dream, which cements to a faith in the future MOOC revolution of higher education, nevertheless presents a discourse and figure that are argued against with a deep seriousness among participants to the online forums (ilhan2000, 2013). As a result, the figure and discourse of ilhan evokes constitutive tensions organizing user discourses in the discussion forums of *The Chronicle*.

The dreamer self-identifies as Turkish, and “a graduate of Stanford in engineering” who helped design “the first anticollision [sic] devices for airplanes.” “I read all comments,” he writes, and “I write very often to Governer [sic] Brown of California” (ilhan2000, 2013). (1) A consistent interpretation is articulated by ilhan who problematizes MOOCs along specific, determinist lines: technological innovations now afford the cheap and global delivery of college courses such that a massive transformation of higher education has begun. With prophetic certainty, ilhan draws three central conclusions: the development of online open platforms represents the inevitable paradigm of future education; given high start-up costs and an open market, students will inevitably select MOOCs offered by prestigious institutions that, through economies of scale, will achieve global, mass enrollments and, according to ilhan, will eventually begin offering degree (e.g. MITx); thus, the only alternative for community colleges and less-renown universities will be to accept a licensing model where a few elite schools produce and license courses to other institutions which are allowed to cut spending and tuition, improve access, and stay viable in a market driven by prestige brands and their undoubted educational quality.

The interactive practices of ilhan present a twofold pattern: one consistent with other superparticipants and the other presenting an important variance. Ilhan, like all superparticipants, (2) predominantly replies to other users, as well as (3) primarily exhibits rhetorical practices of acknowledgment, argument, and interpretation. In these practices he often seeks to interpret and clarify issues present in the attendant article according to his specific interpretations (39.2% total; 59.1% of monologues), while also acknowledging others who similarly describe MOOCs (29.1% of replies). Conversely, interlocutors respond to these interpretations in overwhelming disagreement (50% arguing/critiquing) that significantly slips often into demeaning critiques (16.9% demeaning), while at the same time offering few acknowledgements/agreements (3.9%). These critical responses identify and challenge the salient claims and their assumptions ilhan routinely puts forth. To the inevitable march of technological progress: “And all change is for the better and all resistance of all change is futile. Sad” (Thumoeides, 2013), rejecting the “dream” of degree-bearing MOOC programs: “Yes, maybe that works in the ilhan world of fantasy, but here on Earth, Stanford costs ~\$60,000/year and isn’t about to grant

actual Stanford degrees online for a few hundred dollars” (Unemployed\_Northeastern, 2013); and addressing the absence of concern for educational quality: “If you bothered to look at some data, you would have seen this coming. There is plenty of research that shows low-achieving and younger students struggle online—even in classes of 25” (pols437, 2013).

In the interaction between ilhan’s interpretive claims and other participants’ disagreements and dismissals, the figure of ilhan emerges as part-unwitting laughing stock humoring the comment forums and, simultaneously, a representative characterization of those supporting the MOOC movement. As the latter, ilhan is received with a serious, sneering opposition that articulates the eccentricities of ilhan’s commenting as general attributes of a commercial and technocentric menace threatening higher education in pushing the adoption of MOOCs. As such, ilhan features as a novel regular to MOOC discussions:

Where is ilhan? Has anybody seen him recently? It's been forever since he showed up to burble [sic] about MOOCs. I'm worried about the little monomaniac. (weeks, 2013)

probably got a higher paying blogging gig for endorsing hydraulic fracking or removing evolution from textbooks. (archman, 2013)

Clearly noted for extremism, ilhan is approached across the primary antagonism organizing the forums aligning him within a disparate assemblage of actors commonly labelled neoconservative. Beyond humor, the numerous grammatical errors and syntactic quirks distinctive of his comments become a point of sober derision, a stigma of the inferiority of MOOCs as an educational model. Thus both the comments and figure of ilhan become representative of a political enemy: “Behold the argument against MOOCs,” begins one reply to ilhan’s post, “If this is the product of MOOCs, then I would like to add this: Well. MOOC doesn’t teach write effectively. MOOC no teach think well. MOOC fail to achieve goal of education. MOOC bad” (3rdtyrant, 2013) This line of ridicule is not isolated, another respondent links another ilhan comment to the news Georgia Tech will offer an online master’s in computer science, “This response reads like the typical online student response to a discussion board question, lacking both depth and insight. But no cause for alarm -- you will receive credit for this response at Georgia Tech” (Publaw, 2013). Elsewhere:

They are facts" is not an English sentence. Neither is "Yes teachers 1,000,000 will be jobless in 10 years." But when MOOCs have completed their destruction of the American system of higher education, no one will be left who knows that. Illiteracy rulez! Go for it, venture capitalists! (Observer, 2013)

Throughout the comment forums the recognition of ilhan as a regular (“Has anyone seen ilhan? Isn’t ilhan supposed to be here?” (weeks, 2013)), eccentric novelty quickly darkens as interlocutors successively articulate his figure among a host of actors made compatible in their inimical positioning relative to discourses stressing the irreproducible educational quality afforded through traditional, embodied interaction between professor and student.

### 5.1.2 The Professoriate

The remaining four superparticipants all self-identify as professors. There is, apparently, a gratefully-former adjunct (Aaron, 2013), a professor who likens MOOCs to Twinkies (“don’t eat the twinkie!” - (archman, 2014)), an “ex-state college professor who got [sic] PhD at 51” (Henry Vandenburg, 2013), and a University of Virginia physics professor (Keith Williams, 2013). Like ilhan, these commenters stand out for their frequent contributions (n=343). However, unlike ilhan, they articulate discourses organized around the particular, primary antagonism that rejects MOOCs as inferior to the embodied, traditional university classroom they perceive as under threat. Along this antagonism, before any shared professional characteristics, their gathering as members of what will be labelled “the professoriate” ultimately takes shape, and, again like ilhan, defines an organic position within the discourse.

This position finds orientation through articulation of the primary antagonism organizing their discourses throughout the forum. Across the comments of “the professoriate,” (1) a consistent interpretation pervades:

I'm sorry, but a MOOC is not teaching (Aaron, 2013)

By their very nature, MOOC's are \*not\* student-centered... you end up with \*inferior\* services. (archman, 2013)

MOOCs are worse even than normal online classes, which are worse than anything live. (Henry Vandenburg, 2013)

MOOCs have taken on a parasitic aspect that concerns me... I see real promise for MOOCs in the preparatory and continuing education sectors. That is where the focus should be, in my view. (Keith Williams, 2013)

Articulating a spectrum in which the traditional, embodied classroom is privileged, these users draw a primary antagonism that serves to organize discourses within the online comment forums. As primary, the difference between the traditional classroom, understood as the unique locus of effective teaching and learning, and MOOCs translates the range of elements brought into discussion. This antagonism intensifies with the common assertion that "MOOC's are being heavily pushed as for-credit surrogates for college classes" (archman, 2013). Consequently, the classroom, site of "an intimate process," (Henry Vandenburg, 2013) remains under threat by models which are "not equivalent" (Aaron, 2013) and worse represent "attempt to "TA" the professoriat [sic] (like "flipping" only worse.)" (Henry Vandenburg, 2013). Importantly, this threat follows from the same prestige universities/brands ilhan perceives as unmistakable signifiers of quality education ready to be opened (licensed) to the global masses. Instead, for the professoriate, they become heralds of a widening professional and social inequality gap:

Yes, colleges will "adapt". The poorest colleges will outsource their courses to contracted MOOC's, and not even have faculty, or even classrooms. The wealthiest colleges will boycott MOOC's altogether, except for the MOOC's they themselves sponsor and "sell" to private industry. You can see where the trend is going. An even greater disparity between educational quality in higher education. (archman, 2013)

Turning to the discourses of these superparticipants reveals the primary antagonism structuring discussions within the forums: the inferiority of MOOCs to the traditional classrooms they stand to displace. From this articulated, constitutive difference are ordered a range of other elements that enter discussion and which are then ordered by logics extending from this primary antagonism.

If we recognize a structuring of discourses across the comment forums as articulated around the primary antagonism described above, discourses become defined, that is, arguments form to which users such as those of the professoriate become inscribed. As with ilhan2000, the professoriate articulates these discourses with a consistent and rigid discipline, enforcing antagonisms that both accord privilege and identify opponents. In this regard, if the traditional university classroom is the only site of quality education then only professors teaching those courses are fit to make judgments that might transform the traditional educational model:

The actual fact of the matter, is that we in the professoriate fully understand (better than anyone else, since we actually \*do\* the teaching) that some pedagogy models work better than others for learning. (archman, 2013)

What makes you think the average student will learn better? We who actually teach them know that MOOCs won't work. (Henry Vandenburg, 2013)

Well now... this is unfolding \*exactly\* as many of us predicted. (Keith Williams)

There is a confidence, a distinct certainty in the incontrovertible facts discernable through the chains of equivalence generated from the antagonism that follows from discourses defending the unassailable quality of traditional education. This certainty is not constant; rather, it rises only when the primary antagonism stands threatened. However, when threatened, lines become quickly drawn yielding opponents (such as ilhan) from whom all bases of authority are pulled out from underfoot. In this regard, the (2) tendencies of superparticipants to reply (71.7%) rather than issue monologues (24.2%), as well as (3) adopt rhetorical practices of either acknowledgement/ agreement or argument/criticism shapes the discursive topology of the comment forums such that comments infringing on the antagonisms established by the professoriate, primary among them the inherent inferiority of MOOC educational models to those of the traditional classroom, become directly opposed to arguments to the contrary, replies re-articulating the delinquent or variant comment along lines that would re-establish the integrity of the primary antagonism organizing the professoriate's discourse. Importantly, the practice of replying articulates both semiotic and material resources, as it utilizes affordances of the interface to position replies selectively within the comment thread.

### 5.1.3 Single Posters

A primary objective of this analysis sought to compare superparticipants to other, less frequently contributing users. As has been explicated, interpretation features as the primary rhetorical practice shared by both superparticipants and single users. In marked distinction from the certainty of the superparticipants, (1) the interpretations of single posters are often tentative, inquisitive, and qualified, as well as often articulated around posed questions:

I am intrigued by how this is being analyzed... (ghsmith76, 2012)

I have a lot of questions regarding the ramifications of MOOCs... (Jason, 2013)

I'm not certain that there will ever be an ideal solution to this issue... (Staffnadjunct, 2012)

These (2) comments are predominantly monologues (73%), an inverse from the majority of replies contributed by superparticipants. As such they address the general forum but, interestingly, often feature particular elements, such as anecdotes, within their discussions. Whereas superparticipants frequently post, they do so while articulating a consistent, disciplined discursive program that eschews speculation for certainty, the particular for the panorama. These differences also relate to the broader distribution of rhetorical practices performed by single posters than superparticipants, the former more often expressing personal experience and requesting and providing information. The example below finds a single poster's comment responded to by one of the five analyzed superparticipants:

Very well; I would agree with a critique on the idea of credit for its own sake... but I'd have to disagree with many critiques on content. Anecdotally, I've heard from students who are blown away (and happy to the point of tears) at having found free access to structured, vetted, high-level information... There are plenty of complexities that my "anecdotally" rolls right over, but speaking in absolute terms, there is positive intrinsic value and often financial/professional value in free online courses. (seanconnor, 2013)

Not "free" for very long. Jeeze. (Henry Vandenburg, 2013)

Though this response may be uncharacteristically short, the interactions do exemplify patterns observed in the discourses of single posters: qualified, tentative judgments, and anecdotal evidence. For superparticipants, in contrast, the curt response exemplifies the tendency to reply in disagreement and certitude when alternative arguments are expressed.

## 6 Conclusions

This analysis revealed three primary differences in the interaction patterns and rhetorical practices between superparticipants and single posters. First, both user groups tended to offer interpretations of the discourses emerging from the news media of *The Chronicle* and comments in the discussion forum. Second, an inverse ratio between monologues and replies features between superparticipants and single posters. Third, the relative tendency of superparticipants to argue or supportively acknowledge others in their interactions in the discussion forum contrasts with single users' broader array of practices. These patterns suggest three conclusions:

1. *Interaction patterns feature the ongoing appropriation and re-articulation of discourses within broad, generalized discursive formations organized around a central antagonism that, in turn, actively shapes the emergent discourse network.* Returning to the interesting case of the superparticipant ilhan2000, the interpretations he articulated by themselves structure a consistent discourse in which elements (quality of prestige universities, technical affordances which drive down prices while increasing delivery capacities, licensing models, etc) are related within a consistent, coherent argument. Through his interactions with other superparticipants (i.e. "the professoriate"), however, certain elements latent to his writing (poor grammar, misspellings) became abstracted, appropriated, and re-articulated within an alternative discourse that positioned him as a partisan of the MOOC movement to displace traditional higher education, but also a representative of the claimed educational poverty identified with this movement.

This cannot be addressed as a singular example. Rather, as the capacities of the internet potentially allow increased participation and a diversity of perspectives to interact in locally-global sites such as news media discussion forums, a concurrent tendency responds to the diversity and complexity of these discourses with more expansive, primary antagonisms that function to organize and make intelligible this complexity. In the discursive field emerging through *The Chronicle* forums, the primary antagonism organizing discussion between those who would seek to uphold traditional practices of higher

education and those supporting a MOOC movement to destroy it performs this organizing, discursive function.

Recalling the conclusions of Kelly et al. (2006), the capacity for appropriation and re-articulation of others' interpretations in the service of alternative, ideologically-opposed discourses evidences the function of boundary maintenance the authors recognize. They write:

In anarchic... online political discourse networks, there is active boundary maintenance, informed by group norms held even among those who disagree strongly with one another about the topics under discussion. An author must be interesting to be engaged. The discourse network is shaped, and maintained, by *demand*, not *supply*. (p. 417)

In this sense, "the professorate" clearly finds ilhan2000 interesting as his discussions relate closely to the threats MOOCs are perceived to pose to traditional, brick-and-mortar courses. Here interaction patterns emerge in the discursive demand for his comments as a resource and evidentiary support for their own articulations. This relates closely to the identification of ideological divides, here conceptualized as antagonisms, that Kelly et al. (2006) find as primarily shaping online discourse networks, yielding a:

network structure in which an author population of discursive opponents, though politically clustered into two (or potentially more) distinct groups, are tightly bound in a central discussion core by dense bonds of replies that tie opponents to one another more tightly than allies. (p. 415)

The antagonisms which organize the boundary maintenance practices of participants actively shapes the emergent network structure of online discussions, arbitrating between a polarized yet densely connected core, and outlier or "fringe" discourses which fall outside articulations of the antagonism.

Liang (2014), analyzing the organization of political forum discussions, identifies hub-like structuring effects as a result of a dominant, active minority of users that in turn also receive the majority of replies. Nevertheless, Liang found cross-ideological debate between participants to be an independent principle in organizing political forum discussions, even when accounting for endogenous factors such as the structural mechanisms and conversational norms that encourage the emergence of superparticipants (p. 497). This analysis provides evidence of such cross-ideological debate, and further suggests that the structural and conversational mechanisms associated with frequent participants play an important role in establishing and maintaining the ideological boundaries or antagonisms that organize online discourse networks.

*II. Interaction patterns between superparticipants and single posters vary according to the space each leave open to contingency, with the former contributing to discursive closure within the discussion forums.* The inverse ratios between monologues and replies exhibited between the two user groups coincides with tendencies for definitive, conclusive arguments by superparticipants, while single posters more often articulated tentative, speculative comments or provided personal anecdotes and requests for information that similarly avoided determinate conclusions. Considering the online comment forums as a discursive space organized along lines of antagonism, the often monologic interactions and rhetorical practices articulated by single posters more often functioned to open spaces of contingency within the forum, inviting new possibilities to the discussion forum. Questioning, qualification, and requests for information serve to invite new discourses, increase complexity, and thus the potential for more diverse or dynamic discussion.

Conversely, superparticipants articulated determinate, consistent and often argumentative discourses that sought out contingency in the discursive field and engaged, via replies, these comments in efforts of critical appropriation, re-articulation, and closure. The technical platform and interface of the comment forum positions replies directly opposed to the initial comment to which it is a response, interrupting the default chronological order of the comment thread. Thus acknowledgment or argument, articulated in reply, functions to reproduce discourses or introduce antagonisms respectively, both present semiotic and material displacements that serve to open or close spaces of contingency within the discussion forum.

This finding relates closely to the leadership and moderating role recognized in core members of online communities. Analyses have recognized these members as motivated in "safeguarding the integrity" of a particular practice (Alonso & O'Shea, 2012, p. 212; Bryant et al., 2005), with individuals in online forums assuming the role of the "informal moderator" (Jahnke, 2010, p. 540). The superparticipants interjectural interaction patterns, stepping in at selected points throughout the streams of discussion, functions as a form of moderation. Re-directing discussions, framing issues, and praising posters sharing similar perspectives while highly critical of those who don't, superparticipants emerge as an informal

moderating presence in the forums. Recalling Graham and Wright's (2014) conclusion that superparticipants' roles included "replying to debates and summarizing longer threads for new users," or Albrecht's (2006) label of "old hands," the rhetorical practices and interactive patterns of superparticipants, in contrast to the majority of single contributors, suggest their active role in shaping, constraining, and enforcing community practice within online discussions. In qualification of the "positive functions" recognized by Graham and Wright (2014), this analysis suggests that superparticipants significantly contribute to discursive closure within online discussion forums.

III. *Superparticipants function to structure online discourse.* This analysis has emphasized the function of interaction patterns and rhetorical practices in the articulation of antagonisms contributing to the emergent organization of online discourse. The antagonism organizing an understanding of MOOCs as potential surrogates for traditional, brick-and-mortar courses defined the boundaries of relevant conversation on the discussion forums hosted by *The Chronicle*. As observed in this analysis, comments in these discussion forums held closely to the ideological divide organized by this antagonism, with the positions of participants organized as either partisans of an apparent MOOC movement to supplant traditionally-defined higher education or its obdurate defenders. In addition, superparticipants and single posters in this analysis were identified as exhibiting variant interactive and rhetorical tendencies, encouraging the closure or opening of discursive contingency respectively within the spaces of the comment forums.

Together these two conclusions influence a third, which recalls the recognition initially motivating analysis of superparticipants: the very frequency of their contributions. In their ongoing activity, constancy, and tenacity performing the tripartite practices of acknowledgement, argument and interpretation, and doggedly positioning these in a material and semiotic re-assembly of the interface, superparticipants provide an articulatory core maintaining the primary antagonisms structuring a discursive space. By their very presence and recurrent practices, superparticipants serve to establish durable structures within dynamic comment threads.

## 7 References

- Alonso, A. D., & O'Shea, M. (2012). Moderating virtual sport consumer forums: exploring the role of the volunteer moderator. *International Journal of Networking and Virtual Organisations*, 11(2), 173–187. doi:10.1504/IJNVO.2012.048332
- Albrecht, S. (2006). Whose voice is heard in online deliberation?: A study of participation and representation in political debates on the internet. *Information, Community and Society*, 9(1), 62–82. doi: 10.1080/13691180500519548
- Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs*, 28(3), 801–831. doi: 10.1086/345321
- Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Retrieved from [http://www.benkler.org/Benkler\\_Wealth\\_Of\\_Networks.pdf](http://www.benkler.org/Benkler_Wealth_Of_Networks.pdf)
- Boczkowski, P. J. (2005). *Digitizing the news: Innovation in online newspapers*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Borzillo, S., Aznar, S., & Schmitt, A. (2011). A journey through communities of practice: How and why members move from the periphery to the core. *European Management Journal*, 29(1), 25–42. doi: 10.1016/j.emj.2010.08.004
- Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and beyond: From production to produsage*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Bryant, S. L., Forte, A., & Bruckman, A. (2005). Becoming Wikipedian: Transformation of Participation in a Collaborative Online Encyclopedia. In *Proceedings of the 2005 International ACM SIGGROUP Conference on Supporting Group Work* (pp. 1–10). New York, NY, USA: ACM. doi: 10.1145/1099203.1099205

- Burnett, G., & Buerkle, H. (2004). Information exchange in virtual communities: A comparative study. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 9(2), 00. doi: doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2004.tb00286.x
- Burri, M., Baujard, V., & Etter, J. F. (2006). A qualitative analysis of an internet discussion forum for recent ex-smokers. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, 8(1), S13-S19. doi: 10.1080/14622200601042513
- Canter, L. (2013). The misconception of online comment threads: Content and control on local newspaper websites. *Journalism Practice*, 7(5), 604-619. doi: 10.1080/17512786.2012.740172
- Castells, M. (2011). *The rise of the network society: The information age: Economy, society, and culture*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.
- Choi, S. (2014). The Two-Step Flow of Communication in Twitter-Based Public Forums. *Social Science Computer Review*, 0894439314556599. doi:10.1177/0894439314556599
- Coe, K., Kenski, K., & Rains, S. A. (2014). Online and Uncivil? Patterns and Determinants of Incivility in Newspaper Website Comments. *Journal of Communication*. doi: 10.1111/jcom.12104
- Comor, E. (2010). Contextualizing and critiquing the fantastic prosumer: Power, alienation and hegemony. *Critical Sociology*, 37(3), 309-27. doi: 10.1177/0896920510378767
- Cunha, J., & Orlikowski, W. (2008). Performing catharsis: The use of online discussion forums in organizational change. *Information and Organization*, 18(2), 132-156. doi: 10.1016/j.infoandorg.2008.02.001
- Dahlberg, L. (2001). The Internet and democratic discourse: Exploring the prospects of online deliberative forums extending the public sphere. *Information, Communication & Society*, 4(4), 615-633. doi: 10.1080/13691180110097030
- Fuchs, C. (2009). A contribution to the critique of the political economy of transnational informational capitalism. *Rethinking Marxism*, 21(3), 387-402. doi: 10.1080/08935690902955104
- Fayard, A. L., & DeSanctis, G. (2010). Enacting language games: the development of a sense of 'we-ness' in online forums. *Information Systems Journal*, 20(4), 383-416. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2575.2009.00335.x
- Graham, T. and Wright, S. (2014), Discursive Equality and Everyday Talk Online: The Impact of "Superparticipants". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(3), 625-642. doi: 10.1111/jcc4.12016
- Gramsci, A. (1989) *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith (Eds.). New York, NY: International Publishers.
- Himmelboim, I. (2008). Reply distribution in online discussions: A comparative network analysis of political and health newsgroups. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14(1), 156-177. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2008.01435.x
- Himmelboim, I. (2011). Civil Society and Online Political Discourse The Network Structure of Unrestricted Discussions. *Communication Research*, 38(5), 634-659. doi:10.1177/0093650210384853
- Huffaker, D. (2010). Dimensions of Leadership and Social Influence in Online Communities. *Human Communication Research*, 36(4), 593-617. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2010.01390.x
- Jahnke, I. (2010). Dynamics of social roles in a knowledge management community. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(4), 533-546. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2009.08.010

- Jönsson, A. M., & Örnebring, H. (2011). User-generated Content and the News: empowerment of citizens or interactive illusion?. *Journalism Practice*, 5(2), 127-144. doi: 10.1080/17512786.2010.501155
- Kelly, J. W., Fisher, D., & Smith, M. (2006). Friends, Foes, and Fringe: Norms and Structure in Political Discussion Networks. In *Proceedings of the 2006 International Conference on Digital Government Research* (pp. 412–417). San Diego, California: Digital Government Society of North America. doi:10.1145/1146598.1146727
- Liang, H. (2014). The Organizational Principles of Online Political Discussion: A Relational Event Stream Model for Analysis of Web Forum Deliberation. *Human Communication Research*, 40(4), 483–507. doi: 10.1111/hcre.12034
- Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. New York, NY: Verso.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (2003). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Law, J. (2009). Actor network theory and material semiotics. In B. Turner (Ed.), *The new Blackwell companion to social theory* (pp.141-158). Chichester, UK: Blackwell.
- Lindgren, S. (2011). YouTube gunmen? Mapping participatory media discourse on school shooting videos. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(1), 123-136. doi: 10.1177/0163443710386527
- Park, S., Ko, M., Kim, J., Liu, Y., & Song, J. (2011, March). The politics of comments: predicting political orientation of news stories with commenters' sentiment patterns. In *Proceedings of the ACM 2011 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work* (pp. 113-122). ACM. doi: 10.1145/1958824.1958842
- Levy, P. (2001). Collective intelligence. In D. Trent (Ed.), *Reading digital culture* (pp. 253-8). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Poster, M. (2001). *What's the Matter with the Internet?* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sawyer, S. and Jarrahi, M. (2014). Sociotechnical approaches to the study of information systems. In A. Tucker and H. Topi (Eds.), *Computing Handbook: Information systems and information technology, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (pp. 5-1-5-19). Boca Raton, FL: Taylor & Francis.
- Singer, J. B. (2009). Separate Spaces Discourse About the 2007 Scottish Elections on a National Newspaper Web Site. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 14(4), 477-496. doi: 10.1177/1940161209336659
- Toffler, A. (1980). *The third wave*. New York, NY: Morrow.
- Toffler, A. (2013), Revolutionary Wealth. *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 30: 122–130. doi: 10.1111/npqu.11414
- Weber, R. P. (Ed.). (1990). *Basic content analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

## 8 Online Comment Forum References (in the order of in-text citation)

- ilhan2000. (2012, July 26). MOOCs will die soon. So no threat... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Scenes-From-the-Cookout-Why/133165/>

- ilhan2000. (2013, November 25). You do not understand what MOOCs is... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/MOOCs-Are-Usefully-Middlebrow/143183/>
- david\_williard. (2013, May 2). If this is satire, it's brilliant... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Professors-at-San-Jose/138941/>
- ilhan2000. (2013, February 21). I am a dreamer. If MIT and Harvard offer degrees... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/How-EdX-Plans-to-Earn-and/137433/>
- ilhan2000. (2013, January 15). Keith The problem is " what Udacity is doing ? "... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/California-State-U-Will/136677/>
- ilhan2000. (2013, March 14). Please do not heart Silicon Valley Retirees like me... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Bold-Move-Toward-MOOCs-Sends/137903/>
- ilhan2000. (2013, May 2). I read all comments. Gentlemen... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Document-Open-Letter-From/138937/>
- ilhan2000. (2013, April 29). I am the defender of GOOD MOOCs by non profit elite schools... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Massive-Open-Online-Adventure/138803/>
- Thumoeides. (2013, May 2). And all change is for the better and all resistance of all change is futile... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Professors-at-San-Jose/138941/>
- Unemployed\_Northeastern. (2013, November 4). Yes, maybe that works in the ilhan2000 world of fantasy... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/With-Open-Platform-Stanford/142783/>
- pols437. (2013, July 19). If you bothered to look at some data... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/San-Jose-State-U-Puts-MOOC/140459/>
- weeks. (2013, October 3). Where is ilhan? Has anybody seen him recently?... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/MOOCs-Could-Help-2-Year/142123/>
- archman. (2013, October 3). probably got a higher paying blogging gig for endorsing hydraulic fracking... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/MOOCs-Could-Help-2-Year/142123/>
- 3rdtyrant. (2013, May 2). Behold the argument against MOOCs... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Professors-at-San-Jose/138941/>
- Publaw. (2013, September 3). This response reads like the typical online student response... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/A-MOOC-Star-Defects-at-Least/141331/>
- Observer. (2013, May 28). "They are facts" is not an English sentence... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Outsourced-Lectures-Raise/139471/>
- weeks. (2013, September 16). Has anyone seen ilhan?... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Catholic-Case-Against-MOOCs/141611/>
- Aaron. (2013, September 6) Believe me, I know. I'm on the tenure-track now... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Catholic-Case-Against-MOOCs/141611/>

- archman, (2014, January 14). MOOC's are a Twinkie of Higher Ed... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Doubts-About-MOOCs-Continue-to/144007/?cid=at>
- Henry Vandenburg. (2013, March 18). The usual pattern is for elite school professors to lack teaching skills... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Professors-Behind-the-MOOC/137905/#id=overview>
- Keith Williams. (2013, September 26). Oh, I understand that half of the argument very well... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/In-Colleges-Rush-to-Try/134692/>
- Aaron. (2013, May 9). I'm getting really annoyed at those who say faculty who oppose this are only concerned about their jobs and their self interest... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/As-MOOC-Debate-Simmers-at-San/139147/>
- archman. (2013, October 28). By their very nature, MOOC's are \*not\* student-centered... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/A-MOOC-That-Would-Make-a-Real/142565/>
- Henry Vandenburg. (2013, April 29). Okay. You've further convinced me that you IT guys who push this MOOC crap are just blithering idiots... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Some-Colleges-Are-Saying/138863/>
- Keith Williams. (2013, May 9). Well now... this is unfolding \*exactly\* as many of us predicted... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/As-MOOC-Debate-Simmers-at-San/139147/>
- archman. (2013, March 18). Unfortunately, the model you are drawn to is \*not\* the same one... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Professors-Behind-the-MOOC/137905/#id=overview>
- Henry Vandenburg. (2013, September 3). Make a sociologist famous based on an ethnography that still needs an edit... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Into-the-Future-With-MOOCs/134080/>
- Aaron. (2013, May 20). Let's look at the evidence this very article provides, shall we?... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/What-Professors-Can-Learn-From/139367/>
- Henry Vandenburg. (2013, May 2). You know what? Each course is about the presenting professor's unique synthesis of the material... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Professors-at-San-Jose/138941/>
- archman. (2013, March 25). Yes, colleges will "adapt"... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/I-Dont-Want-to-Be-Moocd/138013/>
- archman. (2013, June 19). This is not an accurate view of the professoriate... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Universities-in-Consortium/139919/>
- Henry Vandenburg. (2013, May 28). What makes you think the average student will learn better?... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Outsourced-Lectures-Raise/139471/>
- ghsmith76. (2012, August 16). I am intrigued by how this is being analyzed... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Dozens-of-Plagiarism-Incidents/133697/>
- Jason. (2013, March 18). I visited a major department store and asked an employee where to get a certain item from the store?... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Professors-Behind-the-MOOC/137905/#id=overview>

- Staffnadjunct. (2012, September 17). I'm not certain that there will ever be an ideal solution to this issue... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Can-MOOCs-Help-Sell/134446/>
- oneseeking. (2013, May 9). When I read the comment from American University, I had the sense it was venturing into an antitrust zone... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/As-MOOC-Debate-Simmers-at-San/139147/>
- Aaron. (2013, May 9). Because humans have changed so much in the past 10 years... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/As-MOOC-Debate-Simmers-at-San/139147/>
- seanconnor. (2013, July 8). Very well; I would agree with a critique on the idea of credit for its own sake... [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Universitys-Offer-of-Credit/140131/>
- Henry Vandenburg. (2013, July 8). Not "free" for very long. Jeeze. [online forum comment]. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Universitys-Offer-of-Credit/140131/>

## 9 Table of Tables

Table 1. User sample (superparticipants and single posters).....	4
Table 2. Content analysis of rhetorical practices (totals) .....	5
Table 3. Content analysis of rhetorical practices (Interaction: Monologues) .....	6
Table 4. Content analysis of rhetorical practices (Interaction: Replies).....	6
Table 5. Content analysis of rhetorical practices (Interaction: Responses).....	6