

Rhetorical Move Structure of Massive Open Online Courses' Descriptions

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Abstract

Massive Open Online Courses constitute an integral part of online education. Despite the frequency and significance of MOOC descriptions, little research has been done regarding their functional features, and hardly any guidance has been given in teacher training programs about how to write them. Therefore, this study explores the genre of MOOC descriptions by investigating its rhetorical move structure and its possible communicative purposes using Bhatia's (1993) rhetorical move structure analysis of sales promotion letters as a starting point. Based on the analysis of a corpus of 15 MOOC descriptions, seven recurrent moves were identified, namely, establishing the credentials of the tutor, offering the course, highlighting the benefits of the course, incentivizing potential students, soliciting action, defining the audience and presenting proof. The investigations also revealed that, unlike traditional, dominantly informative course descriptions, MOOC descriptions also have a distinct promotional function, as evidenced by the shared similarities between MOOC descriptions and SPLs in terms of their intended communicative purposes and the moves employed to achieve them.

Keywords: genre analysis, MOOCs, English for Specific Purposes, rhetorical move structure, online education

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, the rapid growth of technology has revolutionized several facets of human life, including education. With technology providing the means to communicate and access online resources, the number of platforms offering Massive Open Online Courses (henceforth MOOCs) has increased. Hoy (2014) defined MOOCs as “online classes that anyone, anywhere can participate in, usually for free. They are made up of short video lectures combined with computer graded tests and online forums where participants can discuss the material or get help” (pp. 85-86). Thus far, there have been many platforms that provide this type of courses like Udacity, Coursera, edX and Udemy in many areas of expertise like computer sciences, languages, mathematics, among others. Numerous studies have addressed the MOOCs phenomenon (Hone & El Said, 2016; Hoy, 2014; Hew & Cheung, 2014; Guo et al., 2014; Christensen et al., 2013; Mackness & William, 2010). However, to the best of my knowledge, there has not been a study that approached MOOC descriptions from the generic perspective, despite its relevance to the theory of genre analysis and the field of language pedagogy (MOOC tutors). Thus, the aim of the current study is to propose a theory and data-based model that is capable of revealing the rhetorical move structure and the communicative purposes of MOOC descriptions by using Bhatia’s (1993) sales promotion letter’s (henceforth SPL) model as a starting point in analyzing 15 MOOC descriptions. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What similarities and differences can be identified between MOOC descriptions and sales promotion letters?
2. What is the rhetorical move structure of the genre of MOOC descriptions?
3. Based on the outcomes of the move analysis, what communicative purposes of MOOC descriptions may be identified?

The answers to the research questions are hoped to provide a broader understanding of the genre of MOOC descriptions in terms of its rhetorical move structure, communicative purpose and generic characteristics.

This article starts by providing the theoretical background regarding MOOCs, rhetorical move structure analysis, and the genre of sales promotion letters and its relevance to the current undertaking. Next, a description is provided with regard to the corpus and the methods of data

collection and analysis. Afterwards, the results of the analysis are provided and discussed. Finally, conclusions are drawn accordingly.

2. Theoretical Background

The current section consists of three sub-sections, MOOCs, RMS analysis and Bhatia's (1993) SPL. The literature review regarding MOOCs is expected to familiarize the reader with the contextual information about the factors that lead to the emergence of the MOOC descriptions. The second subsection provides an account of the theoretical and empirical research with regard to the RMS analysis developed by Swales (1981). The last sub-section presents a comparison between the SPLs and MOOC descriptions to accent the similarities and differences between the two genres.

2.1 Massive Open Online Courses

Although the primary focus of the current investigation is on the structural composition of MOOC descriptions as a genre, it is important to reveal the key characteristics of those who produce them (i.e., the tutors), as well as the factors that prompt them to provide MOOCs and, possibly, MOOC descriptions. The instructors of MOOCs are usually professors or experts in a certain domain, but virtually anyone can instruct a MOOC (Hoy, 2014). Hew & Cheung (2014) identified three motivations for instructors to upload MOOCs. The first is *curiosity*, which is essentially an enduring interest in undergoing the process of having thousands of students online. The second motive is *personal*, put simply, it is induced by the desire to be amongst the first to teach a MOOC. Finally, instructors offer MOOCs because they seem to want to help others. However, in the case of the MOOC platform under analysis (Udemy.com), most of the courses are paid. This indicates that financial gains might play a role in motivating tutors. This thought makes it plausible to think of MOOCs as a product and of the tutor as the producer.

The students who enroll in MOOCs are more than those who enroll in regular courses for many reasons such as accessibility, availability, and requirements, among others. However, enrolling in a MOOC does not necessarily mean completing the course. Jordan (2014) studied the trends of enrolment and completion of MOOCs. She opted to research Edx, Udacity, and Coursera, as not only have they received the most media attention but also because they "reflect the high education sector more broadly" (p. 153). Her study comprised 88 courses in which the number of enrolled students ranged between 4,500 and 226,652 students with a median value of 42,844 students. The rate of students who completed the course (in other words, the students who

gained a certificate) ranged from 0.9% to 36.1%, with a median value of 6.5%. As this article investigates MOOC descriptions, it seems necessary to clarify the meanings that the word “enroll” might carry in the context of MOOCs.

The notions regarding the motivation behind producing MOOCs, and the dropout rates might carry significant implications for MOOC descriptions. Featherstone (2007) believes that in today’s consumer culture, promotional activities are influencing not only businesses, but also academic and personal contexts. Thinking of MOOCs as products and of tutors as producers raise questions as for how the tools which tutors use to promote their MOOCs. As the focus of the current study is the textual tools, MOOC descriptions are going to be investigated as a possible container of promoting tactics.

2.2 Genre Theory and Rhetorical Move Structure Analysis

According to Swales (1990), genre is “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes which are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community” (p. 58). In this definition, he highlights the importance of two elements that constitute a particular genre, namely, the communicative purposes and the discourse community. Bhatia (2014) suggested that among many factors that influence a genre (content, form and audience, to name but a few), the goal which it seeks to achieve defines it. That is, an attempt to replace a key communicative purpose in a particular genre, produces another one. For example, the aim of course descriptions is to inform students, who are planning to take the course, about the materials, requirements, dates, and the learning outcomes, among others. However, if instead of informative, the communicative purpose became persuading students to participate in the course, a distinct genre would emerge.

Rhetorical move structure (RMS) is a form of textual scrutiny that was developed by Swales (1981). It focuses principally on the communicative purpose of a section (a sentence or more) of a specific text. That is, a text consists of many parts (i.e., moves), each of which maintains an independent communicative purpose which it seeks to achieve; still, this communicative intent is not impartial as it contributes to the key communicative purpose of the whole text as well. Thus, according to Biber and Upton (2007), a move “refers to a section of a text that performs a specific communicative function” (p. 23). By applying RMS theory in the academic field (research articles), Swales (1981) worked to help non-native students enter the academic discourse community by facilitating the academic writing process. Put simply, when

students are aware of the particles (moves or steps) that constitute a genre, it becomes easier for them to associate these parts with their functions (i.e., communicative purposes). This knowledge guides students in the process of producing effective academic research papers. RMS theory led to the development of the Create a Research Space (CARS) model by Swales (1990), where he analyzed the structure of the introduction section in academic research articles. Like CARS, the current study aims to provide an analytical model that can be used to help MOOC tutors write effective MOOC descriptions.

Rhetorical move structure analysis has also been applied to non-academic genres. Bhatia (1993) carried out a research to reveal the rhetorical move structure of Sales Promotion Letters (SPL) of which the key communicative purpose is to persuade the receiver of the letter to purchase a product or service. The analysis showed that SPLs consist of seven moves, namely, establishing credentials, introducing the offer, offering incentives, enclosing documents, soliciting response, using pressure tactics and ending politely (see 2.3 for details). Bhatia (2005) claimed that each genre maintains boundaries which it does not transcend. Put simply, genres tend to adhere to its characteristics such as the form and the communicative purposes. However, the technological advancements, the incredibly massive amounts of data and the surmounting impact of advertising and promotion caused some genres to operate beyond their predefined generic features. Academic genres are not an exception as some of the genres that were considered informative such as book introductions, job descriptions and book blurbs, to name but a few, have employed promotional tactics in order to reach the intended communicative purpose, that is to persuade. For example, a study of academic books introductions showed that they do not solely intend to report what the rest of the book is about, but also to convince the reader to invest resources (time or money) in the book (Bhatia, 1997c).

2.3 A Theory-based Comparison of SPLs and MOOC Descriptions

This section offers a systematic comparison of Bhatia's (1993) sales promotion letter genre and the MOOC descriptions genre to highlight (a) the reasons why Bhatia's analytical framework may provide a reliable starting point for the design of the analytical model to be used for the in-depth structural analysis of the MOOC descriptions genre, (b) the elements of Bhatia's framework that are incorporated in the newly designed model for the genre analysis of MOOC descriptions.

The first step that was done after collecting the corpus is a thorough reading of the MOOC descriptions. The descriptions were reviewed many times in order to gain a deeper understanding of this genre. This preliminary investigation resulted in establishing some basic features of these descriptions. The first characteristic of MOOC descriptions is that they do not employ visuals (pictures, videos, or figures, among others) to convey their message. That is, the authors of MOOC descriptions use only written texts to convey their message. The other characteristic feature is that MOOC descriptions are titled as *Course Descriptions* which imply that these descriptions are informative (like traditional, offline course descriptions). Notwithstanding, it seems that the authors of MOOC descriptions use these descriptions to promote their courses and themselves as well. Therefore, based on these two key features, this genre may be argued to share many similarities with the promotional sales letters that were analyzed by Bhatia (1993). Thus, Bhatia's (1993) sales promotional letter (henceforth SPL) RMS analysis was used as a starting point for the theoretical analysis. The following subsections should provide an in-depth description of the similarities and differences between the two genres based on the 7 identified moves in SPLs (see Figure 1).

2.3.1. Establishing Credentials

The first move identified by Bhatia (1993) in the SPL is establishing the credentials of the company that the writer works for. SPL establish the credentials by precisely identifying the needs of the target audience (i.e., a particular company). This reflects the extensive experience of the company in providing the needed services or products, for instance, "We are expertly aware that international financial managers need to be able to ask the right questions and work in the marketplace with confidence" (Bhatia, 1993, p. 100). Similarly, in MOOC descriptions, the writer (i.e., the tutor) establishes their professional credentials. The MOOC descriptions corpus demonstrates that tutors establish their credentials by highlighting their achievements in their fields such as previously taught courses, publishes, or delivered lectures, among others. For example, "This course is taught by Wordpress author and teacher, Dr Andy Williams, who has over a decade of experience using and teaching Wordpress to people of all skill levels" (Udemy.com, Wordpress for Beginners Course).

2.3.2. Introducing the Offer

Bhatia (1993) highlighted the importance of this move in the SPLs because it addresses the gap that was created in the first move (i.e., highlighting the needs). This move incorporates

three sub-moves starting with “offering the product or service”. Then, “essential detailing of the offer”, where the author provides a detailed description of the product. In the third step, “indicating value of the offer”, the writer points out the appealing aspects of the product. Likewise, MOOC descriptions introduce the product (i.e., the course) in a similar way. Nevertheless, in MOOC descriptions, the detailed description of the product includes the syllabus of the course. On this account, it is necessary to rename the second sub-move essential detailing of the product or service with “introducing the syllabus”. Furthermore, in Udemy.com, many other tutors advertise their courses in shared platforms (sometimes in the same page), therefore, many tutors draw the attention of the readers away from competitors by criticizing them. To illustrate, “More in-depth training techniques than any other course” (Udemy.com, complete presentation skills master class for every occasion). This justifies including “identifying gaps in other courses” as an additional sub-move to the MOOCs move structure. I also decided to keep the third sub-move of Bhatia’s (1993) SPL Indicating the value of the product or service with a slight change in the wording (to fit MOOCs context) to become “listing the benefits of the course” (see Figure 2).

2.3.3 Offering Incentives

This move is used to persuade the audience to invest in a product or hire a specific service by offering them a discount or other special offers (Bhatia, 1993). In business, most of these exclusive offers are to do with discounts, while in MOOC descriptions the case is different. Tutors in MOOC descriptions can provide exclusive offers and prices, but it is not the incentive that they primarily use. In the corpus, it was evident that the types of incentives that tutors use are money back guarantee and instant answers to students’ questions. To illustrate, “You will get Udemy Certificate of Completion available for download, 30-day money back guarantee” (Udemy.com, Integral algebra).

2.3.4 Enclosing Documents

As the audience of the SPL consists chiefly of active businesspeople, SPLs tend to be brief and informative. Hence, the function of this move is to inform the recipient that there is more detailed information should they become interested in the offer. This move, however, was not detected in the corpus; therefore, it is unlikely to be included in the proposed MOOC descriptions’ model.

2.3.5 Soliciting Response

The aim of any business letter is to motivate the receiver to establish or strengthen a particular type of relationship with the sender. Hence, it is necessary to include the contact details of the company in SPLs. This move is going to be adopted in the MOOCs move structure, after modifying its definition as the aim of the writers of MOOC descriptions is soliciting a response from potential students as well. In MOOC descriptions, the expected response from potential students is to enroll in the course. For example, “Are you ready? Then take this course and start speaking German right away!” (Udemy.com, German Made Simple)

2.3.6 Using Pressure Tactics

This move intends to impose psychological pressure on the client to make a quick decision. Although it might appear similar to “offering incentives”, it is different in the sense that it does not offer any additional gains, instead, it provokes fear. The fear of losing something (time, discount, offer) if they do not act promptly. Although this type of tactics was spotted only once during the analysis, it is going to be incorporated in the preliminary MOOC Descriptions model as it might occur in other MOOC descriptions.

2.3.7 Ending Politely

The goal of this move is to end the SPL with a favorable impression. Bhatia (1993) claimed that ending the letter politely is not the case with all business letters, especially those letters that are sent to express dissatisfaction or end a business relationship with a particular party. The move “ending politely” was not detected in MOOC descriptions. Instead, the descriptions ended with few lines that define the target audience. This does not imply that the language of the descriptions was unpolite, nonetheless, descriptions did not end with a standard polite salutation (e.g., sincerely yours, best regards, to name a few).

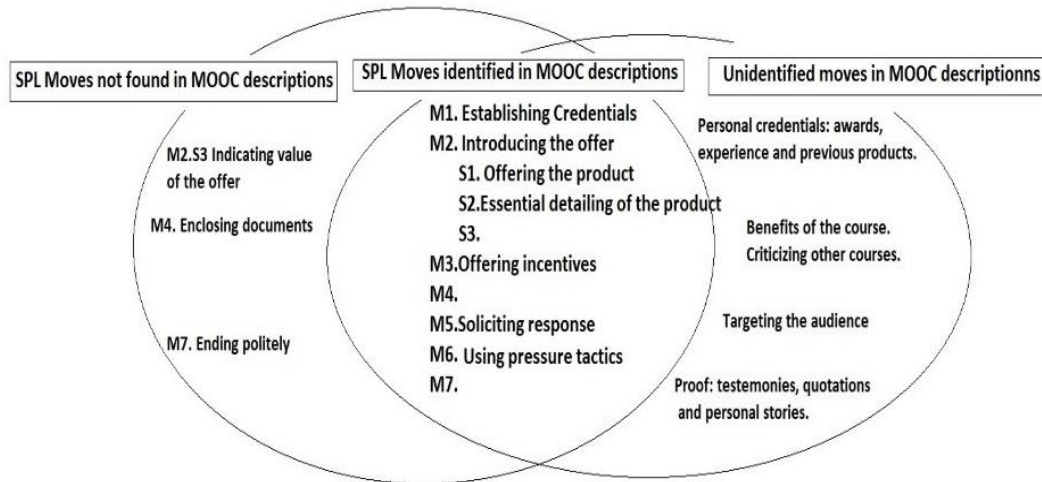


Figure 1. The move structure of Sales Promotion Letters and MOOC descriptions

3. Research Methods

The present section provides information regarding the two stages of the analysis. Before all else, a detailed description of the collected corpus is presented to ensure a deep understanding of the special nature of the genre under scrutiny. Secondly (in Section 3.2 piloting the theory-based model), the methods of developing a theory-based model, based on the application of Bhatia's (1993) SPLs model to MOOC description (Figure 2), is discussed. Finally, I will propose a new theory and data-based model for the generic study of MOOC descriptions. It is theory-based, as it starts out from the relevant theories of genre analysis. It is, however, also data based, because as previous theories were not targeted selectively at the MOOC description genre, the model is complemented by the specificities of this special genre, based on the empirical outcomes of its first piloting.

3.1 Corpus

Swales' (1981) RMS analysis was conducted on a corpus that consists of 15 MOOC descriptions. The descriptions were categorized into 3 groups of five randomly for the three stages of piloting (applying the SPL model, piloting the preliminary MOOC descriptions model and piloting the theory and data-based model). These descriptions were collected from one MOOC platform (Udemy.com), an established platform that offers over 100k courses to more than 30 million students in more than 50 languages. This platform was selected because its directors do not partake in writing the descriptions of the courses (according to course creating instructions on the platform). MOOC descriptions in Udemy.com are written by the tutors

themselves; therefore, the odds of encountering irregularities and new techniques in the descriptions are higher than in a platform where the descriptions are written by the platform (marketing/sales specialists or directors) itself.

The criteria for collecting the corpus are based mostly on the number of words as well as the type of the courses. The number of words is between 600-1000 words per one MOOC description since this is the average number of words in most of the observed MOOC descriptions. On top of that, descriptions with this number of words are more likely to include pertinent data for the study. Regarding the variety of courses, I chose the course descriptions which are more frequented by students. This decision was uneasy since there are various courses on this platform. Selected MOOC descriptions are from MOOCs that specialize in computer sciences (i.e., ethical hacking and programming among others), business (i.e., marketing, management, and financial analysis), and education (i.e., train the trainer, online teaching, and teacher training).

3.2 Piloting the Theory-based Model

The aim of this stage of analysis is to apply Bhatia's (1993) SPL model to 5 MOOC descriptions to be able to complement it based on empirical evidence. The analysis started with segmenting MOOC descriptions into smaller functional discourse units (moves). Put simply, it was segmented into smaller meaningful units that perform a rhetorical function such as introducing the course or establishing credentials, among others. Thereafter, the moves of SPL model (e.g., establishing credentials, introducing the offer, to name a few) were assigned to the text units of MOOC descriptions in accordance with their communicative purpose. Assigning the moves to the segmented units of the MOOC descriptions was based on the definitions of these moves that was provided by Bhatia (1993). To ensure the validity of the analysis, two coders carried out the analysis separately. Analyses showed more than 80% consistency.

Although several moves in MOOC descriptions were identified using the SPL model, there were many other moves/steps that were not (see Figure 1). In MOOC descriptions, tutors included testimonies from students who enrolled in the course previously. For instance, "This is better than any other course I have come across... the presentation is simply superb" (Udemy.com, Mastering IELTS Writing Task). In such testimonies, previous students write their opinions regarding the course. For example, "Michael hands us a template where much of the complexity is reduced so that I can focus on the more personal stuff of my story." (Udemy.com,

Short Story Romance). Another unidentified move is when the tutor provides a personal story in the description. Additionally, quotations from experts in the fields were additionally included in some of the descriptions. Therefore, it seemed logical to introduce a new move that comprises these three categories, namely, “Proof”.

Furthermore, in MOOC descriptions, it was observed that tutors discuss the benefits that potential students would obtain after joining the course. That is, the ways in which the provided knowledge can help potential students accomplish their goals. Also, tutors describe the type of students who would benefit the most from joining the course. This description included beneficiaries’ age, experiences or skills, to name but a few.

The modifications that were applied to Bhatia’s (1993) framework brought into the picture a preliminary move structure model (see Figure 2) that is expected to identify the rhetorical moves of the so-called MOOC description genre. It is also worth mentioning that the moves in MOOC descriptions lack a canonical order, unlike Bhatia’s (1993) SPL move structure, as at this phase of the analysis it was not possible to identify a definite order of the moves in MOOC descriptions.

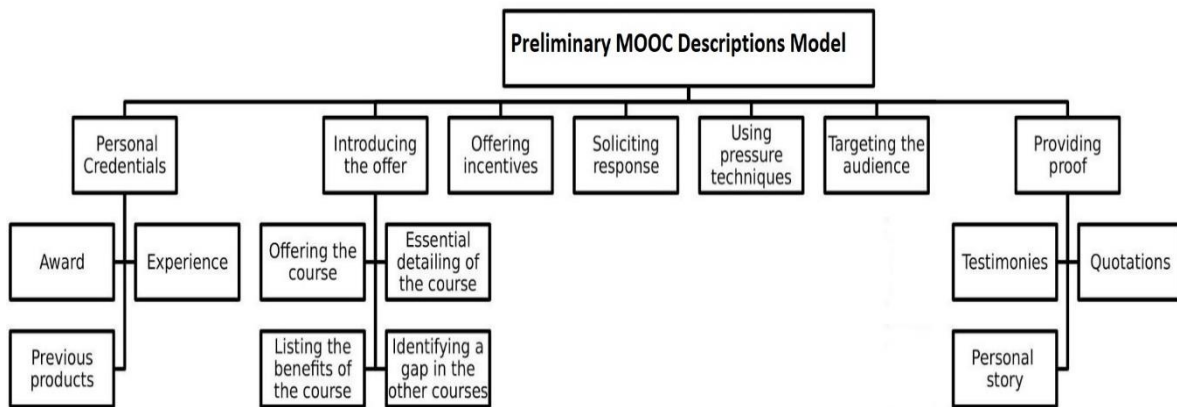


Figure 2. Preliminary MOOC Descriptions Model

3.3 Piloting the Theory and Data-based Model

After complementing and modifying Bhatia’s (1993) SPL to become compatible with MOOC descriptions (see Figure 2), the so-called Preliminary MOOC Descriptions Model was piloted again on five different MOOC descriptions. The procedures of analysis of the first stage were employed in the current stage, too. The results of the piloting indicated that the Model

(Figure 2) failed to identify all the moves and steps in these descriptions. Therefore, some changes were introduced to the theory-based model to improve its capability to reveal the generic structure of MOOC descriptions (for more details see 4.1 The results of piloting the theory-based model). After introducing the modifications, the last version of the MOOC descriptions model (Figure 3) was piloted on another five different MOOC descriptions, following the same procedures of analysis as described in section 3.2. To ensure the validity and reliability of the final model, a co-coder was asked to independently code five MOOC descriptions using the final model. The co-coder was trained and presented with the variables' definitions (i.e., moves) prior to the coding process. The analysis showed more than 80% agreement rate between the coders' analysis, therefore, the coding of the data may be argued to be reliable.

4. Results and Discussion

The present section consists of three subsections. The first one gives an account of the results of the piloting stage of the theory-based model. The second sub-section presents and discusses the results of the piloting stage of the theory and data-based model. Last, based on the results of the piloting stages, an explanation of the underpinning communicative purposes of MOOC descriptions is presented.

4.1 The Results of Piloting the Theory-based Model

As noted earlier, the modified and complemented version of the SPL model (Figure 2) was not capable of identifying all the moves and sub-moves in the second stage of piloting (see 3.3). Therefore, further improvements had to be introduced.

The first adjustment was introduced to the second move “introducing the offer” by deleting “listing the benefits” sub-move. However, it was introduced later as an independent move since MOOC descriptions, not only have they placed considerable emphasis on the benefits of the course, but also on the benefits of the skill itself. To give an instance, “Start teaching English online and earn a lucrative source of income as a freelance teacher!” (Udemy.com, Teach English online). This encouraged me to add two sub-moves labelled “of the course” and “of the skill” (see Figure 3).

The second modification that was introduced is renaming “soliciting response” to “soliciting action”. The objective of this modification is that in Bhatia's (1993) SPL move structure, this move encouraged the audience to communicate with the author or the author's company in order to purchase or to request further information about the product or the service.

Nonetheless, In MOOC descriptions, the author is not urging the audience to communicate with them, but to act (i.e., enroll in the course).

The third modification was deleting the move “using pressure tactics” from the preliminary model because it was not detected in the descriptions. Seemingly, the reason is that the courses are downloadable pre-recorded videos, thus scarcity as a pressure tactic would not be effective. Nevertheless, this conjecture is not determinate in any way. More research is required to cover this area.

Finally, the last modification that was introduced concerns the “presenting proof” move. The sub-move labelled “testimonials” was changed to “reviews” as the analysis showed that tutors copy previous students’ opinions about the course from the review section in the platform (Udemy). Apart from relabeling this sub-move, a distinction was made between two types of reviews; one that gives positive feedback about the tutor whereas the other presents a favorable description of the course. This was not the only modification that presenting proof had to go through as “statistics” (sub-move) was also added. Evidently, many authors of MOOC descriptions utilized statistics to support their claims. For instance, “around 80 % of the projects are web hacking related.” (Udemy.com, Web hacking). Implementing these changes resulted in a refined version of the model displayed in figure 3. To ensure the validity and reliability of the final model, a co-coder was invited to independently code five MOOC descriptions using the final model. The co-coder was trained and presented with the definitions of the variables (i.e., moves) prior to the coding process. The analysis showed more than 80% agreement with the co-coder’s analysis.

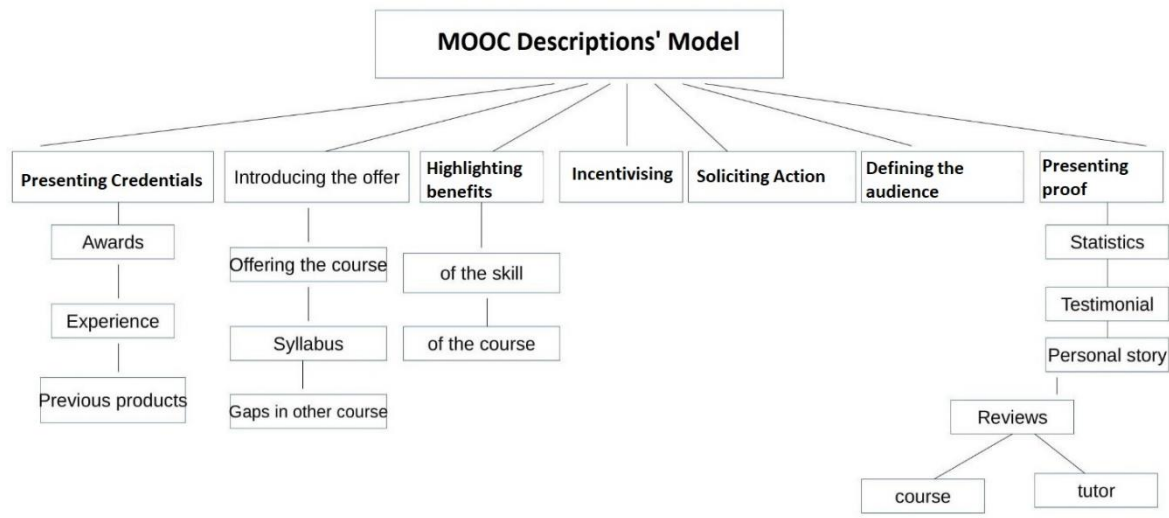


Figure 3 MOOC Descriptions' Model

4.2 The Results of Piloting the Theory and Data-based Model

MOOC Descriptions Model (Figure 3) was used to analyze the rhetorical move structure of five MOOC descriptions in the corpus (for a sample analysis see Appendix A). The 7 moves model could identify the moves and the steps of all the descriptions effectively. Most of the moves of the model could be detected in the descriptions except for one (<https://www.udemy.com/bootstrap-to-wordpress/>) of the five descriptions which included 6 moves out of the 7 moves model. The following subsections discuss the seven moves in details.

4.2.1 Presenting Credentials

The principal function of this move is demonstrating the trustworthiness of the tutor. One way of proving one's trustworthiness is through highlighting their contributions to a field, or through referring to their outstanding teaching skills. Three main ways were used by the tutors for establishing their credibility. The first one refers to the awards which they have received, for example, "this course is being taught by award winning MBA professor" (udemy.com, An entire MBA in one course). Moreover, credibility was established by referring to the experience of the tutor in a particular area of expertise, for instance, "with significant real world experience working at Goldman Sachs as well as in the venture capital, hedge fund and consulting industries" (udemy.com, An entire MBA in one course). Referring to previous successful courses, books or other relevant products could also be considered as a way to establish the trustworthiness of the tutor, to illustrate, "His book, 'Secret to Foolproof Presentations' was a USA Today # 1 Bestseller, as well as a Wall Street Journal, and Business Week Bestseller" (udemy.com, Complete presentation skills master class for every occasion). RMS analysis showed that tutors use at least one of these steps (i.e., award, experience and previous products) to present themselves as credible/trustworthy.

4.2.2 Introducing the Offer

The communicative purpose of this move is to present the offer (i.e., the course) to potential students. Three steps are incorporated within this move. The first step, offering the course, is intended to provide a concise description of the course that is being offered, for example, "Are you ready to take your career to the next level? In this course, you will learn everything you need to know about business from starting a company to taking it public"

(udemy.com, An entire MBA in one course). After offering the course, tutors provide the syllabus of the course. Some MOOC descriptions authors prefer to provide a thorough long syllabus, for example,

1. **Intro:** What is digital advertising and marketing? (Banner ads, video ads, social media, audio, rich media, takeovers, the IAB, etc.)
2. **The Digital Ecosystem:** What are the different types of digital advertising vendors? (Publishers, exchange, network, DSP, etc.)
3. **Buying the Ads:** What are the different types of buying models and the advantages of each? (CPM, CPC, GRPs, etc)
4. **Ad Targeting:** How does targeting work and how is the data collected? Why does one person get an ad and not another? (Cookie data, PII, registration data, IP address, DMPs)
5. **Ad Serving:** How is the ad actually served to a user? (Ad servers, their purpose and how they function)
6. **Reporting:** What do advertisers look for and what do they measure? (Setting KPIs and pulling/formatting reports) (udemy.com, Digital advertising & marketing).

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Others, however, include the areas that are going to be covered in the course in a less detailed manner, for instance,

The contents of this course are all based on my work experience at several firms, including Goldman Sachs, the consulting industry at Accenture, a few companies I have started, the hedge fund industry where I worked at Citadel and also in the venture capital sector (the firm I founded had a venture capital investment in Facebook).I included helpful practical business concepts I learned while I did an MBA at Columbia University and a Bachelor of Commerce degree at McGill University. Think of this course as a “greatest hits” business summaries from my MBA, undergraduate business degree, work experience in consulting, equities, hedge funds, venture capital and starting my own companies (udemy.com, An entire MBA in one course).

The third step “gaps” presents the voids in other courses. This step is utilized by some tutors to accent the excellence of their courses compared to other MOOCs online, for example, “It has more lectures than any other course and more hours (23+) than any other **train the trainer** course. You will not need another **train the trainer** course after enrolling in this one.” (udemy.com, The complete train the trainer bootcamp beginner & advanced). In this example, the tutor highlights the fact that their course includes more lectures than others do. By doing this, the tutor also draws attention to the disadvantages of other, yet similar, courses (e.g., other courses are incomplete).

4.2.3 Highlighting Benefits

This move gives prominence to the benefits of the course. In order to add value to the course itself, tutors tend to outline the benefits that readers would receive if they decided to enroll in the course, for example, “ In this **train-the-trainer course** you’ll learn everything you need to know for any stage in your **training career**. You will learn everything about entering the training profession” (udemy.com, The complete train the trainers bootcamp beginner & advanced). In the previous example, the tutor emphasizes the benefits of attending this particular course, that is, the benefits of the course (e.g., the first step). Seemingly, some tutors know that only those potential students who are interested in learning the skill itself would consider enrolling in the course. Therefore, many authors append special value to the skill itself, for instance, “The skills you will learn in this course can be applied in any country and to any company.” (udemy.com, Digital advertising and marketing 101). Here, the tutor is highlighting the vast possibilities that potential students would be granted after learning the skill. That is, they are promised to acquire a skill that uncovers more opportunities for them to apply to any company in any country.

4.2.4 Incentivizing

In this move, MOOC description writers offer the advantages that a potential student would gain if they decided to enroll in the course. These incentives are designed to give the impression of gaining something extra—other than the recorded lectures—after joining the course. Some tutors offer E-books, for example, “FREE 384 PAGE MBA BOOK INCLUDED (\$99 value)” (udemy.com, An entire MBA in 1 course). Others offer their help and support “You can ask anything related to the course and Ermin will give you a thoughtful answer which will consistently help you solve the problems you are having in learning ethical hacking and penetration testing” (udemy.com, Penetration testing). As mentioned earlier, large numbers of students enroll in MOOCs, which limits interaction possibilities, unlike regular classrooms with relatively smaller number of students. Thus, this tutor incentivized the audience by offering help and support with the difficulties that may arise throughout the MOOC.

4.2.5 Soliciting Action

Discernibly, tutors want more students to enroll in their courses. Therefore, they make sure to remind the readers, more than once if necessary, to enroll in the course. Tutors use several means to reach this communicative purpose. One tutor decided to accomplish this goal by indirectly inviting the reader to enroll in the course; for example, “I hope to see you as a student in the course when we next meet” (udemy.com, Penetration testing). Another author solicits the same action by writing “Take your career to the next level” (udemy.com, An entire MBA in 1 course). In this statement, the writer suggests that enrolment means advancing one’s career. As seen in the latter two examples, tutors avoid direct imperative call for actions such as “buy now” or “enroll now”. Alternatively, they reword these commands in a subtle way.

4.2.6 Defining the Audience

This move intends to highlight the characteristics of the audience. In other words, it aims at defining the potential beneficiaries either by listing the features of the MOOC itself, or by describing the target audience (i.e., potential students). The features of a MOOC might be the level of difficulty or orientation (theoretical or practical), for example, “only practical concepts that you can use and no boring theory + we won't cover business topics that are common sense” (udemy.com, An entire MBA in 1 course). While the characteristics of the audience may be related to their age, job, specialization or plans; for instance,

Who this course is for:

You can begin this course with any level of knowledge and quickly start advancing your skills as an information technology and security expert anywhere in the world!

If you are working to advance your career on LinkedIn or as a freelancer online, you can use the skills you build in this course to get a better job and to increase your hourly pay rate.

If you are hoping to be a better network administrator, you can use this course to learn how to secure networks and protect assets. (udemy.com, Penetration testing)

Although this move always occurs at the end of the descriptions (designed by the platform), it is not possible to consider it having one fix place in the structure. The analysis showed that this move reoccurred more than once in the description.

4.2.7 Presenting Proof

Tutors of MOOCs seem to understand the importance of supporting their claims with evidence. Given the considerable number of MOOCs, it is difficult for potential students to verify MOOCs' quality. This move includes many forms of proof that tutors use to back their statements such as statistics, reviews, testimonials, or personal stories. Statistics refers to the numbers and percentages that tutors use to back their statements, for instance, "According to recent trends by Statista, the digital advertising industry is on pace to be worth over \$330B a year by 2021" (udemy.com, Digital advertising and marketing). What is meant by reviews, however, is the opinions of previous students regarding the course or the tutor. These reviews are copied from the "Reviews" section—designed by the platform—and pasted in MOOC descriptions. For example,

★★★★★ *"I completed my MBA in 2011 and this was a great refresher. I also got some wonderful takeaways from this course on how to follow my passion and love what I do. Would definitely recommend this lecture to others."*Ali Ashraf

★★★★★ *"Best course ever. I highly recommend this course"* - Aminata Bah

Testimonials, however, differs from reviews in the sense that while reviews are written by previously enrolled students, testimonial are provided by popular persons or organizations. For example, "ACCORDING TO BUSINESS INSIDER: 'Getting your MBA has never been

easier. Haroun is one of the highest rated professors on UdeMy, so you can expect to be in good hands through the course of your education.”” (udemy.com, An entire MBA in 1 course). The author of the previous example cited the opinion of a universally recognized magazine called Business Insider in order to provide a proof of his credibility. Another step that can be used as a proof is a story from the tutors themselves. Personal stories were not detected in the current analysis (5 MOOC descriptions) despite their occurrence in the previous analyzed MOOC descriptions.

4.3 The Communicative Purposes of MOOC Descriptions

Applying Bhatia’s (1993) SPL model in analyzing MOOC descriptions demonstrated the similarities that these two genres share in terms of the rhetorical move structure. This suggests that both genres might be similar in terms of their communicative purposes. MOOC descriptions are similar to SPLs in the sense that they both seek a response from the audience. Put simply, both genres work toward persuading the audience to purchase the product/service. This demonstrates that MOOC descriptions are not only informative as their goal is to elicit action from potential students (i.e., to enroll in the course) as well. Like SPLs’ authors, in order to solicit a response from potential students, the writers of MOOC descriptions employ (sub)communicative purposes that contribute to the dominant communicative purpose of this genre (i.e., to persuade). Based on the RMS analysis of MOOC descriptions, they appear to serve the following communicative purposes:

1. Given the large number of MOOCs, MOOC descriptions should present the course in a way that makes it outstand among others.
2. MOOCs are accessible by anyone; therefore, MOOC descriptions should specify the target audience.
3. The large number of MOOCs makes it difficult to ensure their quality and value, therefore, MOOC descriptions should include sufficient assurances regarding the quality and the value of the offered courses.
4. Unlike books, an ample number of pre-recorded video recordings are hard look through, therefore, MOOC descriptions should provide of the topics/units/terms that are going to be discussed throughout the course.

5. Conclusions

The aim of the current study was to propose a theory and data-based model that is capable of revealing the RMS and the communicative purposes of the genre of MOOC descriptions. Subsequently, this model was piloted on a corpus of MOOC descriptions to test its efficiency in revealing the dominant characteristics of the genre of MOOC descriptions in terms of its rhetorical move structure. Based on the analysis, seven rhetorical moves were identified that compose this genre and distinguish it from other related genres (e.g., traditional course descriptions or SPLs): Personal credentials, Introducing the offer, Benefits, Incentives, Soliciting action, Targeting the audience and Proof. As the model has been found to offer a reliable and valid means for the rigorous analysis of this genre, it may be applied to the study of larger corpora too to reveal the typical linguistic realization of the various moves that compose it. Therefore, future research should consider examining larger corpus from different MOOC platforms.

The outcomes of the current study bring into attention the fact that beside being informative, course descriptions can be promotional as well in the virtual world (i.e., in online education). Furthermore, it adds to our existing knowledge on the theory of discourse/genre analysis as it puts forward an analytical model that may be claimed to reveal the generic characteristics of MOOC descriptions in a reliable and valid manner as well as to be transferable to other contexts (other fields) of online course descriptions, too.

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Appendix A Sample Analysis

<p>#1 MOST PURCHASED BUSINESS COURSE ON UDEMY! ** OVER 185,000 STUDENTS IN 196 COUNTRIES **</p>	<p>Introducing the offer</p>
<p>ACCORDING TO BUSINESS INSIDER: "Getting your MBA has never been easier. Haroun is one of the highest rated professors on Udemy, so you can expect to be in good hands through the course of your education." ****</p>	<p>Presenting Proof Quote</p>
<p>SPECIAL \$99 BONUS: FREE 384 PAGE MBA BOOK INCLUDED (\$99 value). In order to further improve the student experience, there is a free download at the end of every section of this course (contains every slide & entire easy to read comprehensive scripts of all 49 lectures & >100 helpful internet links + more) keeping the course up to date, even easier to understand & even more fun and engaging! **</p>	<p>Incentivizing</p>
<p>Are you ready to take your career to the next level?</p>	<p>Soliciting action</p>
<p>In this course, you will learn everything you need to know about business....from starting a company to taking it public. This course covers all of the important topics you will learn from getting an MBA from a top school + real life practical business concepts that will help make you more successful!</p>	<p>Highlighting benefits Of the course</p>
<p>This course is taught by an award winning MBA professor with significant real world experience working at Goldman Sachs as well as in the venture capital, hedge fund and consulting industries (he has founded several companies and sits on several boards).</p>	<p>Presenting credentials Experience Award</p>
<p>Many business concepts are simply common sense. This course will focus on business concepts that you need to know that might not be common sense. This course makes the general business, accounting and finance process very easy to understand!</p>	<p>Introducing the offer</p>

	Offering the course
The professor of this course is also the author of " <i>101 Crucial Lessons They Don't Teach You in Business School</i> ," which Forbes magazine recently called " <i>1 of 6 books that all entrepreneurs need to read right now.</i> "	Presenting credentials Previous products
The contents of this course are all based on my work experience at several firms, including Goldman Sachs, the consulting industry at Accenture, a few companies I have started, the hedge fund industry where I worked at Citadel and also in the venture capital sector (the firm I founded had a venture capital investment in Facebook).	Establishing credentials Experience
I included helpful practical business concepts I learned while I did an MBA at Columbia University and a Bachelor of Commerce degree at McGill University. Think of this course as a “greatest hits” business summaries from my MBA, undergraduate business degree, work experience in consulting, equities, hedge funds, venture capital and starting my own companies. I have minimized “boring theoretical concepts” in this course in order to keep it as close to reality as possible.	Introducing the offer Syllabus
The concepts of this course have been taught by me in many classes at several universities, where the student feedback has been universally and incredibly positive (please see my LinkedIn profile for student reviews / feedback on my teaching style/effectiveness - thank you. Also please see reviews of my books in Amazon and here in UdeMy on my teaching - particularly in my UdeMy course on " <i>101 Crucial Lessons They Don't Teach You in Business School</i> ").	Presenting credentials experience
Customer Testimonials:	Presenting proof

<p>★★★★★ <i>"I just wanted to shoot you a quick message letting you know I'm really enjoying your MBA course on Udemy. I really like that it's geared towards practitioners rather than just theory. I also wanted to sincerely thank you because your course was the difference in me getting funding this past week."</i> - Chris Backofen, CEO of CastCloud</p>	<p>Reviews Course</p>
<p>★★★★★ <i>"Engaging Course! Comprehensive presentation of key concepts that are well explained in a practical & relevant manner while delivered in easily digestible chunks."</i> - Michael Jordan</p>	<p>Course Course</p>
<p>★★★★★ <i>"I've been in business over 20 years and this course is an excellent refresher to remind you of things you may already know and things you may have forgotten along the way."</i> - Laura Caraccioli</p>	<p>Course Course</p>
<p>★★★★★ <i>"Very clearly structured, presented and spoken. Covers the foundations of entrepreneurship, business and investing."</i> - Jeffrey Koury</p>	<p>Course</p>
<p>★★★★★ <i>"I have just finished this course, and I highly recommend it. I would say that the introduction video gives a good indication of what to expect. You will not be disappointed!"</i> - Ronald Deerenberg</p>	<p>Course</p>
<p>★★★★★ <i>"Great Induction, I Wish University were this exciting, that would definitely make me consider taking on the dept the education comes with."</i> - Christian Baffour-Akoto</p>	<p>Course</p>
<p>★★★★★ <i>"I completed my MBA in 2011 and this was a great refresher. I also got some wonderful takeaways from this course on how to follow my passion and love what I do. Would definitely recommend this lecture to others."</i> Ali Ashraf</p>	<p>Course Course</p>
<p>★★★★★ <i>"Best course ever. I highly recommend this course"</i> - Aminata Bah</p>	<p>Course</p>
<p>★★★★★ <i>"Brilliant course. Have learned so much and looking forward to implementing what i've learned into future endeavours"</i> - Ben Judh</p>	<p>Course</p>

<p>★★★★★ <i>"This is definitely the best course I have attended in my entire life. It is jam-packed with facts, real life truths about the Financial Sector, its inner workings and a hands-on approach. Professor Haroun's approach of doing away with the theoretical jargon and instead providing a rich-in-practical-content makes this course an absolute MUST for students, young and matured executives, business owners of small or large companies to attend. Professor Haroun is an excellent speaker, an invigorating lecturer of whose passion is fervently contagious. As a business owner of 25 years, I wish I had come across Professor Haroun's knowledge and inspiring attitude many years ago. The course material is comprehensive, easy to understand and Professor Haroun's sense of humour and his inclusion of applicable videoclips in his downloadable course material adds spice to the whole experience. I am forever grateful at stumbling across his course on Udemy! Its been a life-changing experience."</i> - Antionette Cronje</p>	<p>Tutor</p>
<p>Students of this course will enjoy learning everything they need to know about business...from starting a company to taking it public while learning the most important topics taught at the top MBA schools in the world.</p>	<p>Highlighting the benefits Of the course</p>
<p>Take your career to the next level!</p>	<p>Soliciting action</p>
<p>Who this course is for: Anyone interested in learning about business (only practical concepts that you can use and no boring theory + we won't cover business topics that are common sense).</p>	<p>Defining the audience</p>