

The MOOC Dropout: Analysis of COURSE COMPLETION Obstacles

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PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Understanding why **MOOC completion rates are low** is an important step in determining whether and **how MOOCs fit** into the overall picture of **the future of higher education**.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1: Why do people fail to complete Massive Open Online Courses?

- What reasons do individuals **self-report** for not completing MOOCs?
- Are there **design elements** of MOOCs that are more closely associated with lack of completion?
- What **outcomes** do users desire and are there any **contradictions** in these desires?

Q2: Who participates in MOOCs?

- Are they **current** higher education students, individuals who have **already completed** higher education degrees, or those who have not completed or **do not have access** to higher education?
- How do the subjects participating in MOOC **courses self-identify**?

SOURCES OF DATA

3 news articles **420** comments coded

example comment

"I signed up for three MOOCs in January--a world history course, a course in what drive innovation, and a philosophy/lit course in modernism/postmodernism. **I've already got three Master's degrees** and a full time job...The completed the innovation course in the sense that I watched all the videos (and will eventually read the text), but I did not do the assigned project (**didn't have the time**)..." (Parr, 2013)

Limitations:

- From voluntarily publicly self-reported comments
- Snapshot in time

METHODS

Q1: Comments were coded directly to points on the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) triangle. What follows is an explanation of how comments were coded to each point. This was done in order to highlight points of contradiction within the activity of MOOCs.

Subject: Included comments related to the individual commenter that indicated they were bored by the material or did not have the appropriate background knowledge to successfully complete a MOOC course.

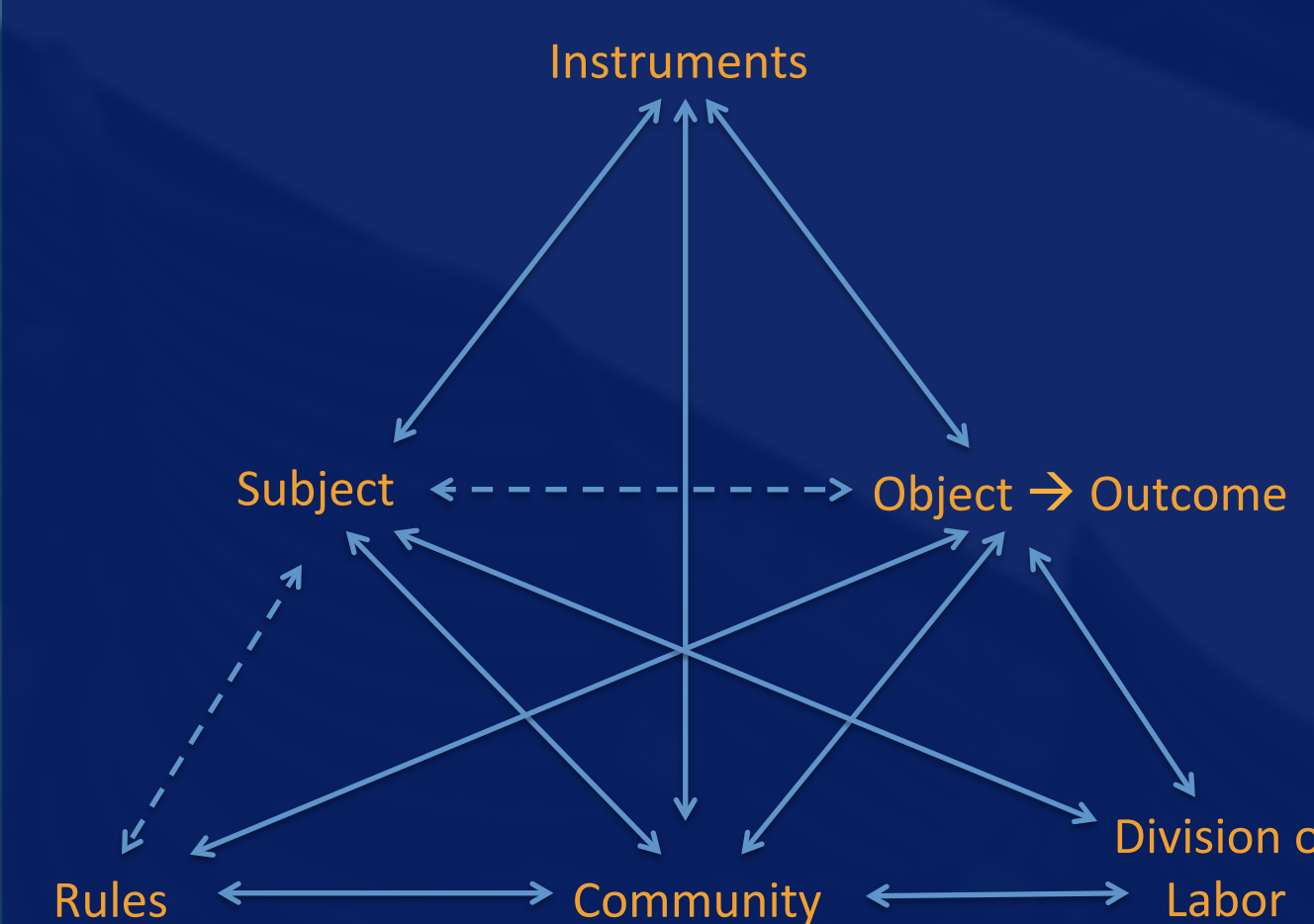
Rules: Included comments related to the way that MOOCs were set up, including how they did or did not implement accountability and how time limitations on the course prevented students from achieving completion.

Community: Included comments related to a problem with other students or the quality of the instructor.

Division of Labor: Included comments related to a problem with the way responsibilities within the course were divided, such as grading being delegated to the peer review process.

Tools: Included comments related to problems of interaction with the course such as not having the required software to complete assignments or not being able to hear video lectures due to a hearing problem and lack of closed captioning on the videos.

Object: Included comments related to the goals of the commenters for taking the course, such as not being interested in actually receiving the certification for completion.



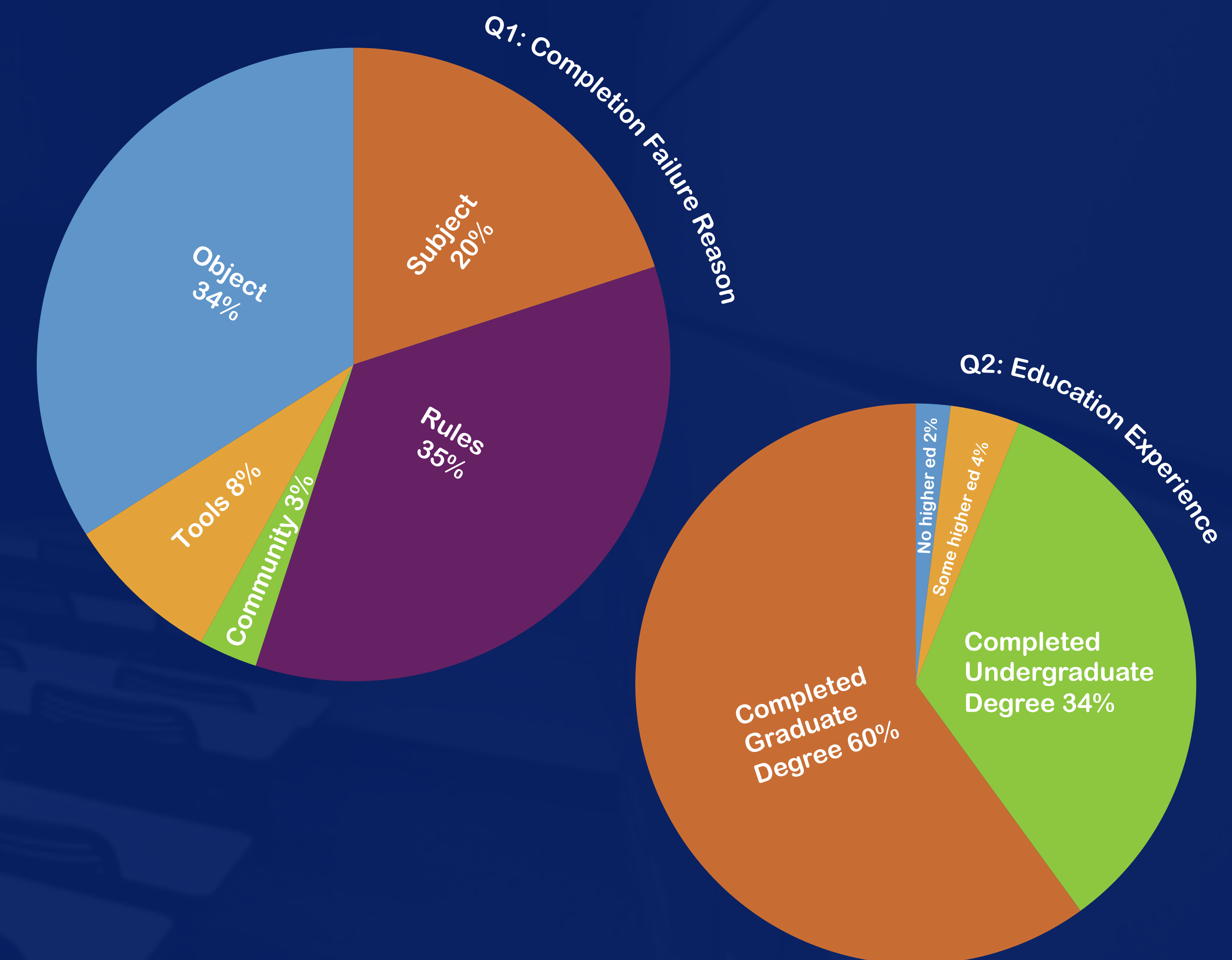
Activity Theory Triangle

← - - - → Contradictions discovered during analysis

Q2: Education Experience Coding

- No higher education experience
- Some higher education experience
- Completed one undergraduate degree
- Completed graduate degree

RESULTS



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were generated based on the contradictions discovered via the Activity Theory Triangle.

Adjust rules by **extending course lengths indefinitely**

Incorporate **non-traditional pre-requisite system**

Set **personal learning goals** rather than certificates of full completion