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Binge learning: what e-learning can learn from Netflix

"Overeating" on TV series is now a common phenomenon. What happens if e-learning is also transported to this form of consumption? Here are the results obtained from a recent study on the subject.

The arrival of Netflix, the streaming platform that allows you to see a large amount of films and TV series in a totally legal way, has allowed you to access lots of content in just one click. In this way, it is possible to have an almost unlimited offer of documentaries, films or series that could hardly be accessed before, if not illegally.

However, there is a danger caused by this great availability, that of the so-called "binge" (in English, "binge") of TV series. The ability to consume is close at hand and this can lead to consumption in large quantities, bet after bet in a few hours, sometimes without a specific order. Can this phenomenon also occur in the eLearning sector? Is it possible to "stuff myself" with content and what effects does it have on students' study?

Temporal binging and content binging

A recent study by Wharton, by Eric Bradlow and J. Wesley Hutchinson, with the participation of Tong Lu, studied the effects of binge eating content in online courses, examining the behavior of students attending a course on Coursera. Scholars have tried to define binges, distinguishing them in two types: "temporal binging" and "content binging".

In the first case the binge of episodes (of lessons or courses) takes place voraciously, one after the other within a given period. In the second case, instead, the binge is more "orderly" and has the purpose of quickly ending a certain series of contents or a specific course. We see episode after episode of a single series of contents in a voracious way and, after finishing it, we immediately start another one (and with it a further binge).

Is "stuffing" of content deleterious?

The result, according to scholars, is contrary to what many would have expected "Bingeing" of training content is positive, as the students who did it during the research obtained better results. Not only. Whoever managed to finish the first course, through this voracious consumption, had more chances to end even a second, a third, and so on. The question that must be answered now, according to the researchers, is which of the two binges (temporal or content binging?) Is the most productive not only for students but also for those who design online courses.

For now, pending results that confirm this study and that can give more details on the "binge learning", it is possible, for those who design online courses, to think of new solutions that can make these binge contents possible. An idea, for example, is to avoid blocking the contents and leaving the students free to move between the lessons, just like on Netflix where, usually, it is not necessary to wait for the following week or to have finished an episode for being able to look at the next one.