

Upgrad Industry Project Part 1

Competitor Analysis

Introduction

Whether it's about brushing up your knowledge in a particular subject or learning a completely new skill, there's no shortage of online courses to help you achieve your goal.

In fact, there are so many choices out there that you may even get confused which online course may be best suited for you.

Upgrad, a higher online education platform is one of the new entrants in the field of online education and is hustling hard to make its mark in the \$107 Billion market

Online education market has become very crowded in the last few years and every company is striving hard to win the biggest piece of the pie. So it's obvious that Upgrad has quite a few competitors out there but in this analysis we only consider the ones that seem to be impacting the market share of Upgrad the most. We chose Simplilearn and Coursera to be the closest competitor to Upgrad. Also, with paid classes, industry experts as mentors, interactive session, they seem to be competing head to head with Upgrad.

Company Overview

About Upgrad

Started in November 2015, by industry veteran Ronnie Screwvala in collaboration with Mayank Kumar, Upgrad aims to provide online higher education while providing industry relevant experience. The USP of Upgrad is that it's programs are developed and delivered in collaboration with the industry experts. Upgrad is still in a very nascent stage with just 4 courses to offer i.e. PG in Digital Marketing and communication, certification course in Product Management, PG Diploma in Data Analytics and Entrepreneurship Certification program and just 5000 registered users. Founders have cumulatively invested around \$ 16 million into the startup

About Simplilearn

Simplilearn is one of the more established player in the industry. Founded in year 2009, the platform has trained more than 500,000 professionals till now and provides over 400 courses. It currently employs somewhere between 500 to 1000 employees and has raised around \$28 million dollars in 3 rounds of funding. It is founded by Krishna Kumar who started Simplilearn after his firm TechUnified got acquired ORG informatics in the year 2007. Simplilearn had a very humble beginning and started off as a project management blog. Simplilearn acquired Digital Marketing training company called Market Motive for \$10 million in the year 2015.

About Coursera

Coursera is one of the biggest player in the industry with over 24 million users (February 2017) and 250+ employees. Started in the year 2012 by two Stanford professors- Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller, Coursera grew at an extremely fast pace, acquiring \$146 million till date. It offers more than 2000 courses with each course lasting somewhere 4 to 10 weeks

Competitive advantage

Upgrad:

Any platform needs its student to successfully complete the course so that they can apply those skills in the actual world and spread the word around.

Upgrad has designed the course in such a way that there's a very strong student support team that is always available to help the students and ensure that they don't face any roadblocks on their way. Also, unlike other online training programs, Upgrad goes a step further and helps students prepare for interviews, helping him/her in placement assistance, offering mentorship calls with industry veterans etc.

More than 90-95% of the students complete the course on Upgrad as compared to just 10% completion rate for free course.

Unlike its competitors Upgrad's programme is designed in a way that it imparts real life experiences which cannot be found online. Upgrad's curriculum is developed and delivered in collaboration with Industry experts who exactly understand what the industry needs and design the programme accordingly. This is one important differentiating factor because most of the online and offline courses are developed without taking the employers into consideration. Perhaps this is the reason why only 30 percent of Indian graduates are even considered employable.

Simplilearn:

One of the very few online education platform (including Upgrad) that provides job assistance to its students.

Strong Network of more than 2000 trainers

40+ global accreditations on its courses

Well established brand name in the market

400+ Courses and new ones being added every now and then

Have successfully proved their mettle to raise \$28 million dollar funding

Coursera:

Massive size of the organization – Includes 24 million users

Deep pockets – Has been able to raise \$146 million till now

Offers a choice of more than 2000 courses to choose from

Content development through the 149 universities across the world

A really well established brand name

Target Market

Upgrad

The target market for Upgrad is pretty similar to that of Simplilearn. Upgrad is again targeting mostly working individuals between the age of 23-45 who are looking to upgrade their skills through online learning. Upgrad's fees is higher as compared other similar online teaching platforms so they are again primarily targeting individuals from Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities.

Simplilearn

Simplilearn has a pretty straight forward target market as compared to Coursera. Simplilearn's target market consists of individuals somewhere between the age of 23-45, from the metros, consisting of a mix of young professionals, middle managers and individuals who want to rejoin the workforce – including women who have been on maternity leaves or breaks.

Coursera

Coursera's target market can be broadly into two categories:

Content Providers

It consists of:

University Partners – Universities that collaborate with Coursera to develop courses

Company Partners – Companies that work with Coursera's partner universities to produce online courses.

Learners –

This comprise of:

Paying Individual learners – User who opt for paid courses on Coursera

Non Paying Individual learners – Users who opt for free courses

Institutional customers – Institutions who collaborate with Coursera to offer courses to their staff

Funding

Upgrad

According to Techcircle.com, Upgrad involves an initial investment of around \$16 million in the first phase. Most of the investment would go into content generation, technology, assessment, adaptive learning, platform building, marketing and establishing a national footprint. Almost all of the amount has been invested by founders and Upgrad has not yet raised external funding. With such aggressive competition out there, Upgrad would have to raise more funds in order to be able to stand against the industry leaders.

Simplilearn

Simplilearn has so far been able to raise \$28 million with the last raised equity funding in April 2015. According to the firm's CEO Krishna Kumar, 'Simplilearn plans to raise atleast \$30-40 million in the

first half of 2017 and utilize it for acquisitions, marketing and expansion, both geographically as well in terms of categories.'

Coursera:

Coursera has been able to raise \$146 million till now in 6 rounds of funding through 13 investors. It's last round of Series C funding came in October 2015 when it raised around \$11.6 million. This gives Coursera a huge advantage over its competitor's as such massive amount of funding can help to improve and expand faster than its competitors.

Products and Revenue models

Upgrad:

Upgrad has very few courses in its arsenal right now. Currently it only offers 4 courses including:

- PG in Digital Marketing and Communication
- Product Management Certification Program
- PG Diploma in Data Analytics
- Entrepreneurship Certification Program

Revenue Stream:

Upgrad earns its revenue from the courses that people buy from its platform. The Courses range from anywhere between 25,000 to 2, 25,000 (plus taxes). Also, Upgrad has another revenue stream where it offers training to corporates which includes online programs and offline workshops.

Simplilearn:

Simplilearn provides a more straightforward pricing and course structure. SimpliLearn offers it's user around 400 courses to choose from.

Revenue Stream:

Each course can range from somewhere between \$20 to a couple of hundred bucks.

Companies can choose for Corporate trainings from Simplilearn as well. **Price: Not disclosed.**

Coursera

Coursera develops its courses in collaboration with the top universities across the world. It currently offers more than 2000 courses. Also, recently Coursera started something called Global Skills initiative where it plans to rope in some really well-known companies to collaborate with the universities and produce online courses together. This is how Coursera develops its courses. Here are a few more details about the courses that Coursera offers:

Courses: Courses include recorded video lectures, auto-graded and peer-reviewed assignments, and community discussion forums. When a user completes a course, he/she receive a sharable electronic Course Certificate.

Price: \$29-\$99

Duration: 4-6 weeks

Specializations:

More rigorous courses that require users to tackle hands-on projects based on real business challenges and allows them to earn a Specialization Certificate that they can share with their professional network and potential employers.

Price: \$39-79

Duration: 4-6 months

Online Degree:

Developed in collaboration with university partners, degrees offer flexible, affordable online degree programs in business, computer science, and data science. After successful completion, user is awarded an accredited Master's degree.

Price: \$15 - \$25,000

Duration: 1-3 Years

Apart from this, Coursera also provides options to Companies to pick a plan and help their team to learn from the various course options that Coursera has to offer.

These plans range from \$100 USD per person (allows each person to take one course) to \$400 USD per person (where each person can choose from 6 courses)

SWOT Analysis

Upgrad

Strength

The company provides one on one academic and non-academic support for all its students by providing them with live projects, case studies, group assignments, access to live lectures, mentorship programs and interactive content

Team comprising of industry veterans like Ronnie Screwvala and Mr. Mayank who has a deep expertise in the the education sector

Extremely high course completion rate of 90-95% in the industry where average course completion rate of MOOCs is less than 7%

Content developed and delievered in collaboration with industry leaders

Strong offline experience provided to the students as well including workshops, meetups, webinars etc.

One of the very few companies in the online ed tech segment to offer job assistance to it's students

Weakness

Has very few courses to offer

Comparatively less certificate recognition as compared to Coursera and Simplilearn.

Opportunity

Opportunity to diversify and add more courses

Opportunity to add more niche courses that may lure more people to join the program

Threat

Upgrad's courses start from Rs. 25,000 and go upto Rs. 2,25,000 and it is a major threat since many MOOCs offer the course for free

There are niche courses that Upgrad offers like certification course in Entrepreneurship and Product Management but there are courses in Data Analytics and Digital Marketing which again would bring it into generic market and may pose as a threat

Organizations with heavy financial backing, more course offering and a wider reach already in the market.

Simplilearn

Strength

High Course completion rate of around 70%

Recent acquisition of Market Motive, a global ed-tech company with high domain expertise, would really help Simplilearn to expand its presence across US. Also, it brings a great team of thought leaders like Avinash Kaushik and Michael Stebbins on-board.

Global network of renowned industry experts creating the courses that it offers.

Professional certification offered by Simplilearn like: Project Management Professional, Cisco Certified Network Associate. It is a niche market and has no distinct leader in the online space

One of the very few ed-tech companies to provide job assistance

Weakness

Major focus on IT courses

Opportunity

Opportunity to add new courses diversify into new sectors like retail, pharma, hospitality etc.

First mover advantage in the online ed-tech + placement assistance services in many countries. Needs to focus aggressively on more corporate tie-ups

Currently only concentrating on India and US markets. Huge opportunity to explore untapped markets as well.

Threat

Threat from really established players who have far more reach. For example Udemy, Coursera etc.

Threat from so many companies offering the same course for free. It can impact the company's revenue.

Coursera

Strength

Very High Brand Reputation

Heavily funded from Venture Capitalists and working monetization channels

High Certificate recognition across the industry. According to Rick Levin, CEO Coursera, Coursera is the second most cited credential on LinkedIn

One of the highest number of courses to offer

Access and expertise to the best technology in the field

Team consists of visionary leaders who have high level of expertise in their respective areas

Weakness

Unfocused business model – All the courses offered on the platform can be taken for free. Only getting a certificate cost \$40-\$110.

Low course completion rate as compared to Simplilearn and Upgrad

Opportunity

With a working model already set in place, Coursera has the opportunity to reach out globally for partners and customers.

Tremendous increase in Internet penetration across developing countries offers a great opportunity for Coursera

A plethora of free courses gives a great competitive edge to Coursera to gain market share in new markets before its competitors

Threat

Since MOOC is still in nascent stage, many companies still don't acknowledge the certificates that Coursera publishes

If more and more companies undervalue the importance of Coursera certificates, students would eventually stop paying for the certificates

Mission

Upgrad

To provide opportunities to individuals to advance their professional journey through rigorous online programs that offer personalized support, developed in collaboration with best in class faculty and industry professionals.

Simplilearn

Simplilearn's mission is to help professionals around the world acquire the skills they need to succeed in today's digital economy.

Coursera

To provide universal access to the world's best education, partnering with top universities and organizations to offer courses online.

Feature Comparison

Engagement Feature comparison of three platforms:

Simplilearn

Has a forum where a user can post the queries and carry out a discussion. These discussion forums are moderated by TA's

1-1 chat feature is not available on the platform

Simplilearn doesn't allow the feature to pause the video and ask a question

Simplilearn has live mentoring session that allows the students to clear their doubts with the mentors

In case a student still faces any issue, Simplilearn has a functionality that allows a student to raise a ticket and get your doubts cleared. Using help and support. But will not be a real time.

Does not allow a student to ask a question within the video

Whatsapp group to allow students to clear their doubts

Upgrad

Has a forum where a user can post queries and carry out a discussion. Forums are moderated by TAs

1-1 chat feature not available on the platform

Upgrad has recently added a 'Q&A' section for a particular session. This is a unique feature that is not available on either Simplilearn or Coursera. As per the user research conducted by us, we believe this feature would be highly beneficial for the students

Upgrad provides live mentoring session to its students as well.

Upgrad makes sure that every class they conduct has a whatsapp group that allows the students to clarify their doubts and discuss the issues

Apart from the features mentioned above Upgrad has a very unique feature that none of the other two platforms provide and that is city based meetups. Upgrad conducts workshops and encourages students to get together in Upgrad's facility to collaborate and discuss together.

Coursera

Coursera has one of the least engagement features as compared to Upgrad and Simplilearn. Mentioned below are the features/functionalities that allow the users to engage with each other:

Discussion Forum: Students have a discussion forum that allows them to post their query and get it answered by a community mentor or a peer

1-1 Chat feature is not available

One of the unique engagement feature that Coursera offers is peer-peer review. Coursera does this primarily because of two reasons. 1. Due to low teacher-student ratio. 2. To increase student's involvement in a course. A student who fails to grade his classmates can't be graded himself so this feature actually makes sure that students do go through the material and know their subject well.

Unlike Simplilearn and Upgrad, Coursera doesn't have a Whatsapp group or live mentoring sessions.

Due to lack of engaging features on Coursera, it tends to have a really low completion rate as compared to Simplilearn and Upgrad.

Major reasons for low engagement and high dropout rate

According to Katy Jordan, whose Ph.D. research focuses on online academic social networks, average completion rate for Massive online courses (including Coursera) is less than 7% and this goes on to show the low engagement level on Coursera as compared to Simplilearn and Upgrad. Simplilearn mentions its course completion rate to be around 70% whereas Upgrad boasts an extremely high course completion rate of 90-95%.

According to the University of Warwick, here are the major reasons for low engagement and course dropout for students taking an Online Course and how three platforms compete with each other.

As mentioned above Coursera is known for providing huge number of free courses on the platform.

Users just shopping around

Large number of people who register on the platform don't even necessarily end up enrolling for a course. According to openculture.com, people, mostly in the case of free course, are usually just shopping around with no real intention of starting the course let alone completing it. On the other hand, Simplilearn and Upgrad charge an substantial amount of fees and try to make sure that the students complete their course work.

Course difficulty and lack of support:

Due to free course offering, Coursera cannot afford to have not many TAs, lecturers or mentoring session. Therefore at least on Coursera students tend to lose interest in participating in discussion forums since it's always students who are answering each other's questions. On the other hand, Simplilearn and Upgrad have TA's/subject matter experts who are always active on the discussion forum and ensure that all queries are being answered.

Lots of students who enroll online are unable to participate in discussions because they lack digital or technical skills.

Here are what each platform does:

Coursera: Does not have any online support system to solve student queries immediately. Users who have a problem can only email the team and get their issue resolved.

Upgrad: Upgrad has a screening process to ensure that any student who enrolls at least has basic technical skills to participate and learn. Also, students can contact the team anytime including Buddy, other students, helpline to get the issue resolved. This is why students on Upgrad are more responsive as compared to Coursera

Simplilearn: Simplilearn doesn't have a screening process for students but have a dedicated team like Upgrad to help resolve student's issues at anytime

Bad Experiences including inappropriate behaviour of peers in the forum, lack of coordination and focus on forums etc.

Simplilearn and Upgrad have TAs to moderate the discussion on the discussion forum and to make sure that discussions are relevant and the students strictly adhere to the forum rules. Coursera on the other hand has to rely on community mentors who have enough experience/ knowledge of the subject and had taken the course previously on the platform. This however leads to two problems on lots of courses that are available on Coursera:

- Advanced courses that require deeper understanding of the subject lack mentors because no one applies to be a mentor
- Courses that are too new and due to this no one applies to be a mentor

So basically students who have a bad experience on discussion forum tend to either stop participating or participate very seldom. In order to increase the interaction on discussion forums and to ensure that students have a sense of belonging to the course, platforms need ensure that they have a good experience on the platform.

Sources:

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User Research

Upgrad IP User Research Insights

Hypothesis 1: Inactive users would prefer discussing in smaller groups rather than open discussions on the Upgrad Discussion Forum.

Hypothesis 2: By combining the learning platform with the discussion forum will result in more interactions and discussions between all users.

Link to the survey:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeuUkrhlaTONVuH2wUTWgYMz4d4lyqLWgxkirAT3ym6hNGxqg/viewform?usp=sf_link

Survey Insights:

- We will build the application features for the web platform as most users access their course content on Desktops/Laptops.
- More than half our respondents use the platform to only get their own queries resolved. They may or may not be very interested in engaging in a discussion.
- Based on the level of participation and forum points, we were able to identify two user group of the Upgrad Students: Active and Inactive.
- We took into consideration that motivations and behaviours of active and inactive students will differ and hence made a path based survey that changes with respect to the engagement level of the user on the discussion forum.

Active Users:

- As active users are already posting and interacting on the platform as compared to others, we wanted to understand how we can improve or introduce new features that will help them have an experience as effective as an offline experience.
- The majority of active users said that they like building personal and professional relationships thru Face to Face interactions.

Inactive Users:

- As inactive users were not making use of the discussion forum's features, we had to find the reasons as to why they are not able to contribute. Hence our survey section on them focused on the reasons for their inactiveness and how they think they could be motivated to increase interactions.
- The major reasons for not participating were
 - Lack of time
 - Tending to forget to post questions once the lecture was over.

- Both the above reasons can be simmered down the fact that currently the learning platform and the discussion forum are considered as two different entities. These users find it time consuming to navigate to a different page altogether and most times may even forget to post their questions.
- Majority of inactive users said they will be more comfortable interacting with a smaller group regularly.
- They also believed that the ability to ask questions right when the lessons are taught is the most advantageous part of an offline classroom.

Proposed Features

On the basis of these insights we propose the following features:

Insights from Survey	Suggested Features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Users would like F2F interaction to build relationships. • Inactive users would like to interact in smaller groups. • Inactive Users point 'lack of time' as one of the most important reason to not participate in discussions • Inactive users tend to forget to post a question and move on to the next video. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chat Function <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Form Groups of 5 - Text Chat and Video call - Share Files • In-video questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - User can pause the video at any time and ask a question. - These questions are visible to others and can be answered during the video itself - The same are populated in the Discussion Forum, module wise.

Proposed Feature Specifications

1. **Chat Function:** This feature will help people who are reluctant to post a question on the forum by helping them make a small group of 5 people and discussing their academic issues.
 - a. It will be a temporary group that a student can make for the purpose of academic discussion. It will cease to exist once everyone has closed their Upgrad session.
 - b. Would allow the users to do text/video chat and share files.
 - c. It would allow the user to send a message to someone while he is offline as well.
 - d. It would show up below on the lecture screen. This would help the user to immediately ask a question to his/her peer even while he is going through the video lecture.

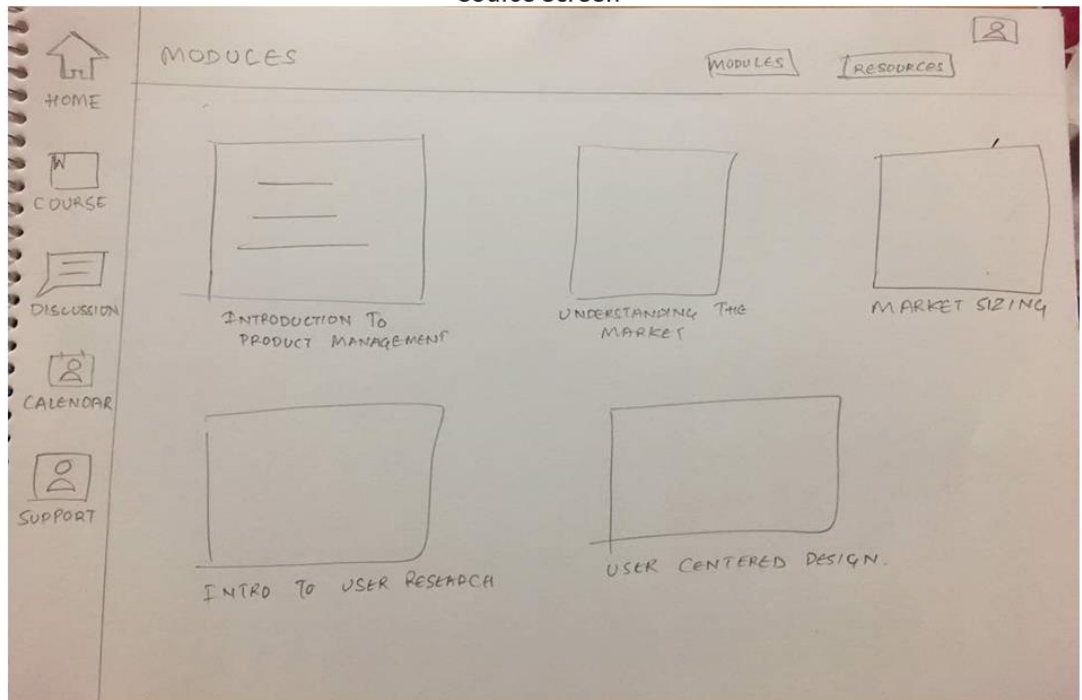
- e. User would have the option to form a small group as well and chat or video chat. Once people see on the 'In-Content discussion feature' who all have been discussing about the topic, he may be inclined to form a small group and have a full-fledged chat.

2. In-Content Discussions: This feature will mimic a real world classroom where a student asks a question right when a doubt crops up his mind. It will reduce the tendency of users forgetting to ask questions at the end of the video. Navigation efforts to actually go to a discussion forum is also eliminated.

- a. Video will run and have yellow marks wherever a question has been asked.
- b. User can pause the video anytime and initiate and ask a question.
- c. The User can also answer questions asked by others while he views all questions.
- d. All discussions on the forum would be populated on the discussion forum as well. Student would only be able to read the discussions from 'In-Content Discussion' and post normally on Discussion forum. In order to add text to 'In-Content' discussion forum, user would need to go the video and then add it.
- e. TA would be directly able to verify the questions or answers from discussion forum.
- f. User would have the ability to download all the complete discussion from the video screen directly in Word Format.
- g. Students would have the freedom to either switch the notification On or Off for his mobile app. (Alerts whenever someone replies)

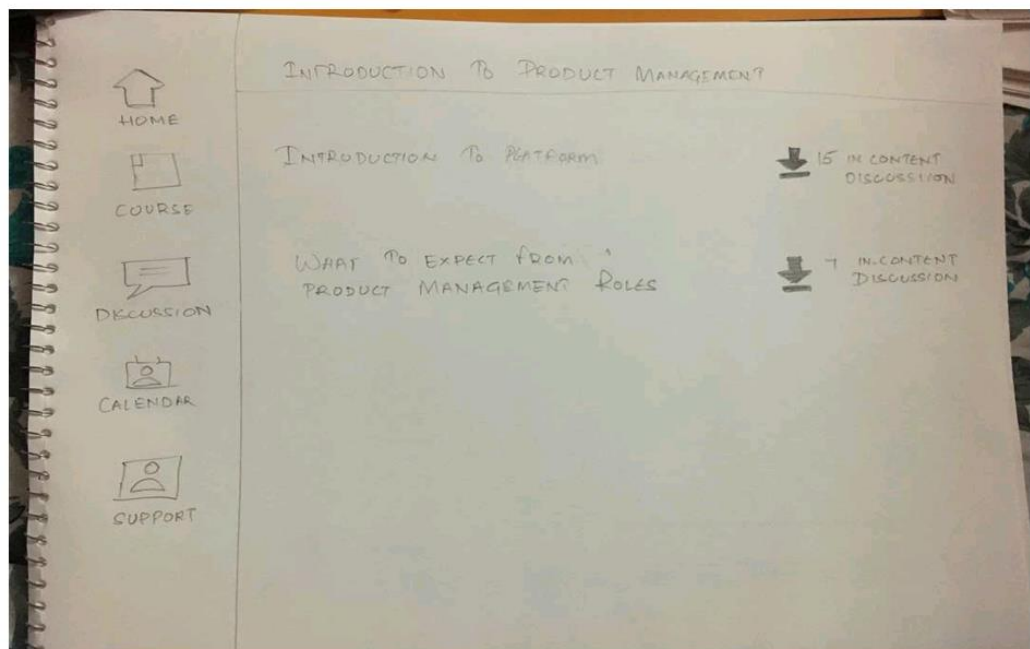
Paper Prototype

Course Screen



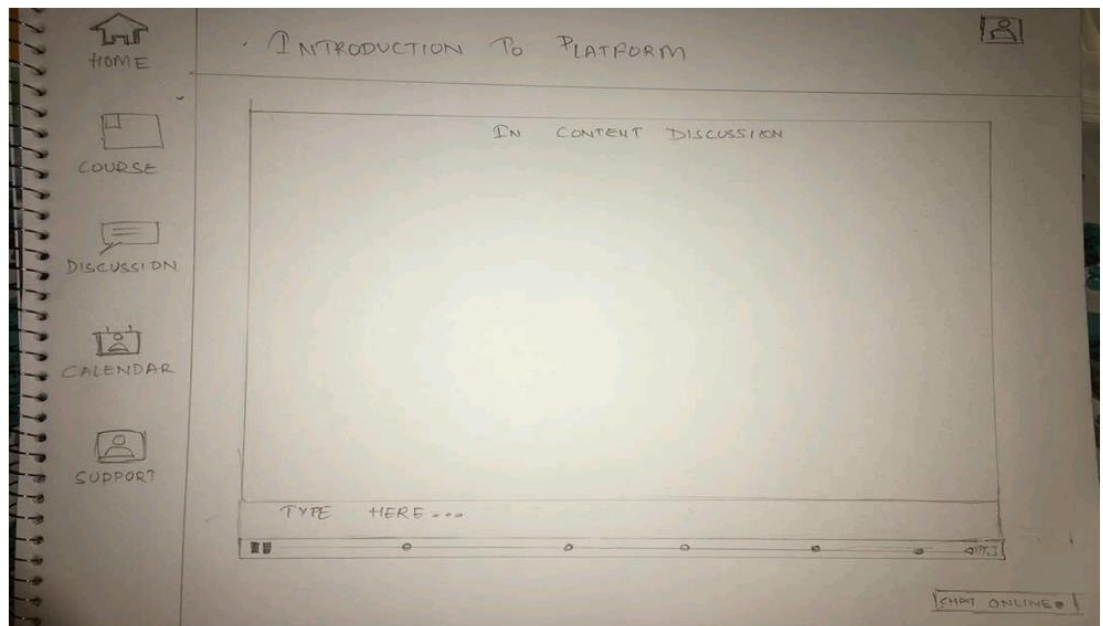
This would be the normal course screen where student would be able to view different modules

Module Screen



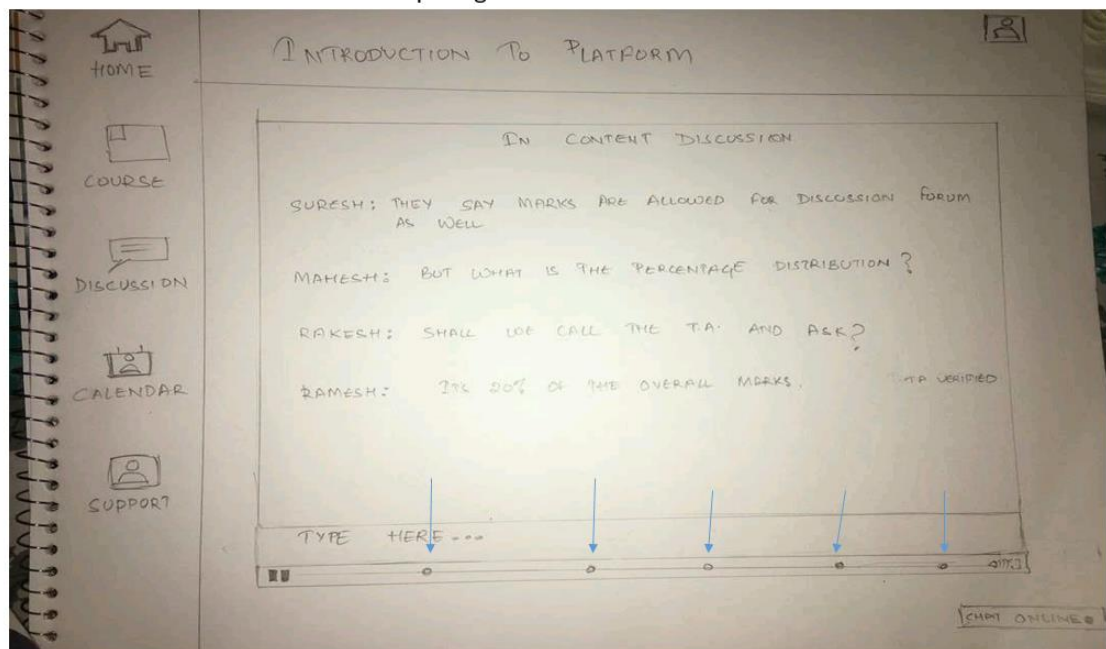
Every lecture that is listed would have a download button in front of it. Students would be able to download all the 'In-Content Discussions' that have taken place and read it. In-Content discussions would basically be the discussions that take place within a video.

Starting a discussion on In-Content Discussion Screen



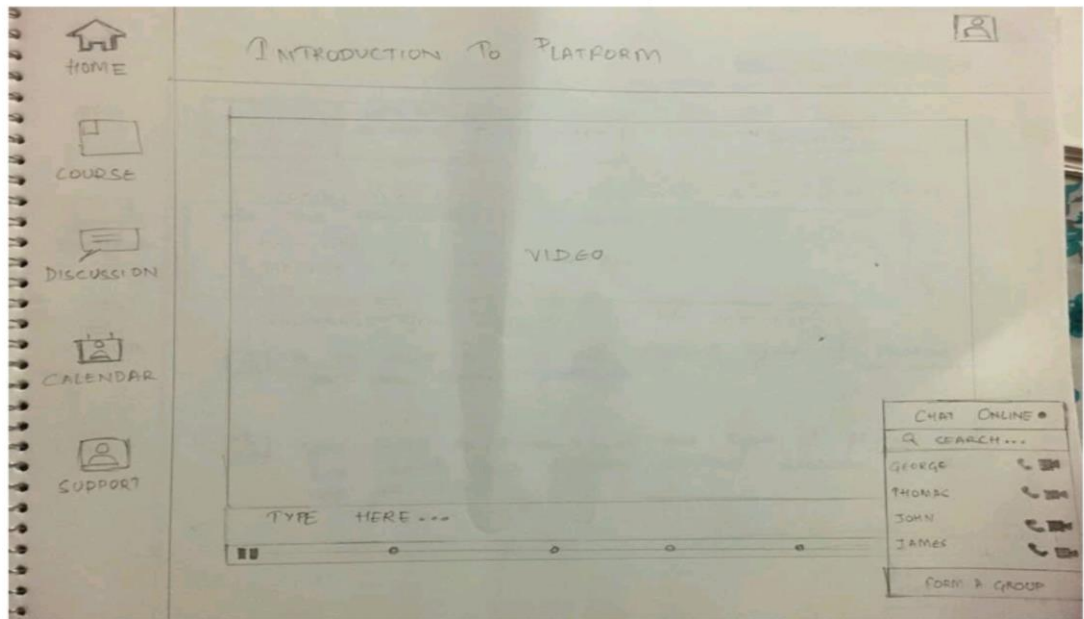
As soon as the student pauses the video, a button called 'Start Discussion' would appear and the student would be able to write text that would be visible to all other students and they would be able to reply on it.

Participating in In-Content Discussion



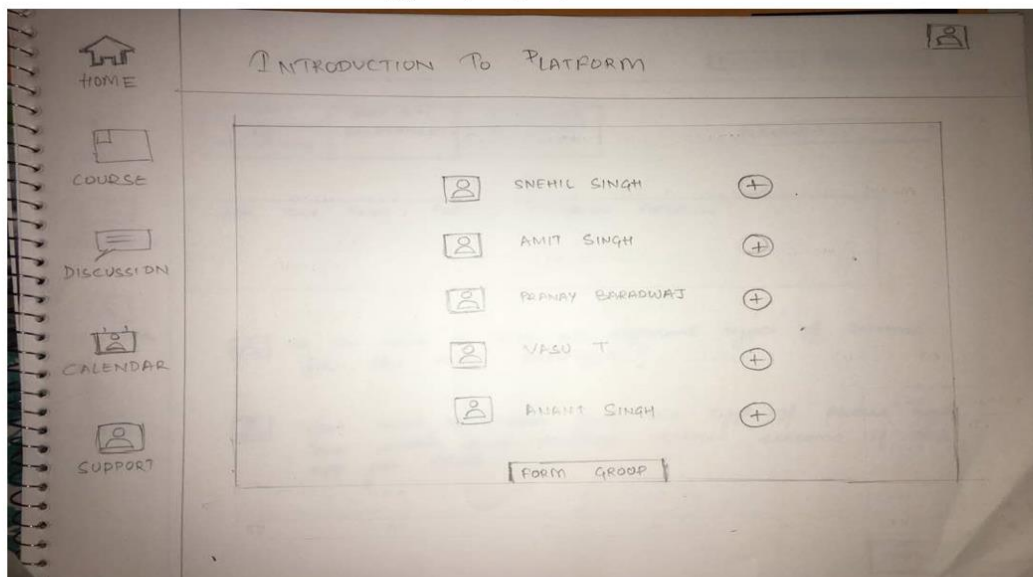
A black colored dot would appear on the video bar (as shown above) to show all the points where students have already held a discussion. User would be able to click on any of the dot and go and participate on that discussion

1-1 Chat Functionality



There would be a 1-1 functionality that would allow the student to either initiate a chat with another student or form a group. Chat functionality would be helpful to the students as they can easily clarify their doubts with their peers or form groups to discuss more about the topic while they are going through the video.

Forming peer-peer group



Upon clicking the 'Form Group' button on the chat (in previous screen), student would see a screen that would show the names of all the other students in his cohort. He can add all the students and click on 'Form Group' to send an invitation for a Audio/Video chat.

Sending Invite

INTRODUCTION TO PLATFORM

HOME

COURSE

DISCUSSION

CALENDAR

SUPPORT

SELECT DAY

DATE

MONTH

TIME

HOUR

MINUTES

PM

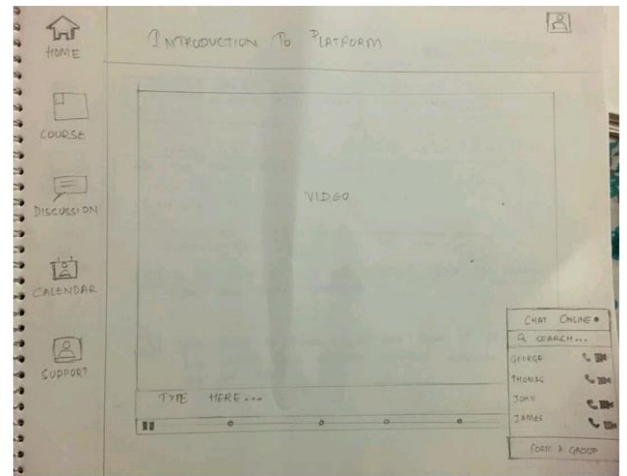
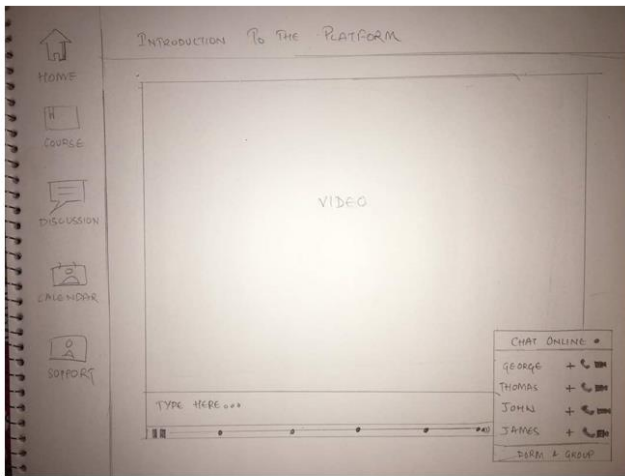
SELECT TOPIC

SEND INVITE

Once the student has selected the students he wants to chat with, he would be shown a screen that would ask him to enter the time and topic for discussion. Once done, he would be able to send the invite to them. Time for the Invite would be automatically updated on user's Google Calendar and he would get a reminder

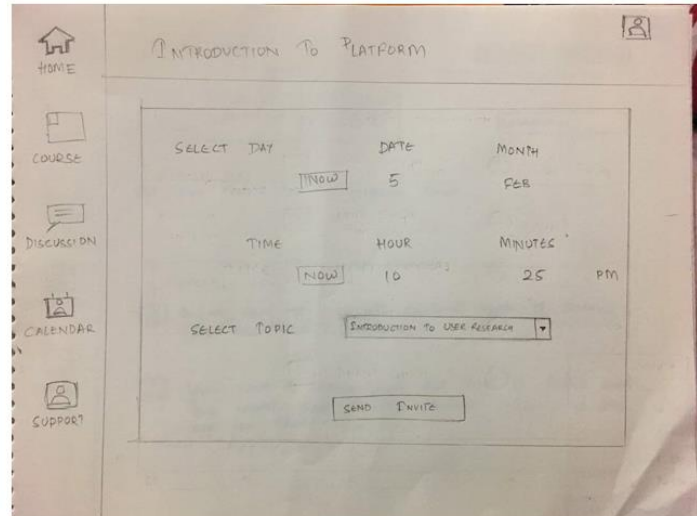
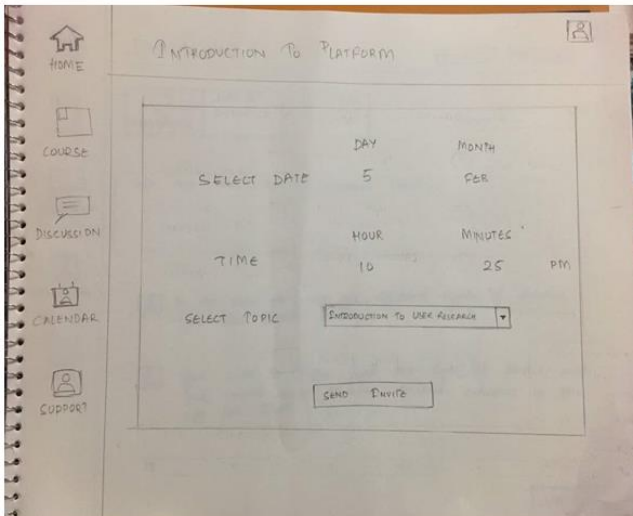
Usability Testing

Usability Testing – Before and After



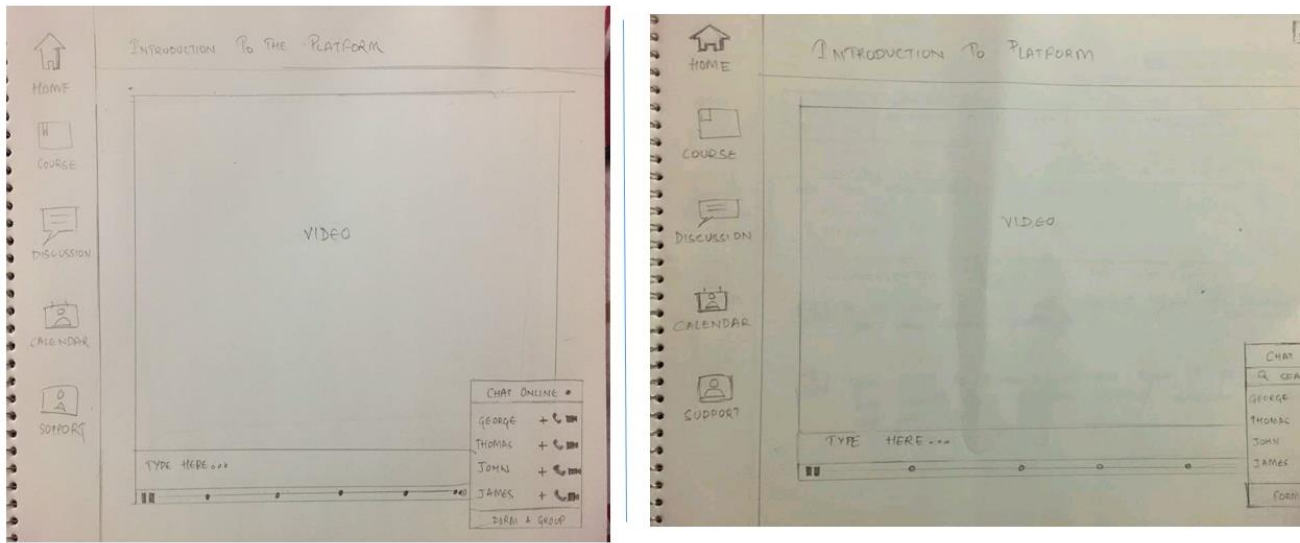
Reason: It would have been cumbersome for a student to add each student and then write the purpose of the call and the time each time. So after receiving the feedback, we added a screen where student would simply need to add everyone and then include the 'reason for call' and time only once.

Usability Testing – Before and After



Reason: We received a feedback and realized there would be times when students may want to have the call right then and there. So we gave them the 'Now' option that would allow the students to send the invite right away.

Usability Testing – Before and After



Reason: After conducting the usability test, we realized that we hadn't added a search bar on the top and students would have to search for other students manually. After the usability test, we added the search bar on top of the chat functionality.

Link to the Wireframe with instructions on how to view it

Instructions for viewing the Wireframe.

1. Please click 'Preview' on top right
2. 'Zoom Out' to 66.77%
3. Scroll up to the top and then scroll left completely
4. Press Shift while viewing the wireframe as it would show up the hotspots on the wireframe

Happy Viewing :)

Link: <https://app.moqups.com/anantsingh1313/Cbp0GvSMrH/view/page/aef720b02>