**Book review – Exploring the factors affecting MOOC retention: A survey study**

Editors: Kate S. Hone, Ghada R. El Said (Published by Elsevier Ltd. 0360-1315/©2016)

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*Exploring the factors affecting MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) retention,* edited by Kate S. Hone, Ghada R. El Said, presents a comprehensive discussion of exploring the factors which affect actual learner retention in MOOC learning. The aim of this research is to examine the effect of experience of MOOC characteristics on learner retention. A useful and innovative work is presented by the authors that is beneficial to online course designers, course instructors and students interested in this research. A survey study is conducted with learners who completed a MOOC and those who dropped out, thus allowing comparisons to be made between these two sub-groups.

The introduction presents a strong premise for the work

* Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) area swiftly growing process of educational provision, holding the possibilities to open up approach to world class teaching and educational resources. The likely benefits are particularly high for students in emerging nations.
* The main focus of this work is on learner experience with MOOC and the effect of experience of MOOC characteristics on learner retention.
* The authors reported a survey study of 379 participants at University in Cairo, Egypt who took a MOOC as part of their development. 122 participants (32.2%) completed the entire course.
* A post MOOC survey of student’s perceptions found that MOOC Course Content is a significant predictor of MOOC retention and same response is given by the course instructor. All-inclusive these constructs showed 79% variance in MOOC retention.
* In order to potentially inform the design of more effective MOOCs their main focus is to investigate whether experiential variables are predictive of the extent to which learners engaged with the course.

**Background**

The author are impressed by some systematic reviews of MOOC research, they are as follows-

Liyanagunawardena et al.(2013) emphasized on loopholes in the literature including a lack of exploration of MOOC in the developing world. Raffaghelli, Cucchiara, and Persico (2015), found a high dependency on case studies in their review of methodology in the MOOC literature. A systematic review of MOOC scholarship and a rich source for data mining to understand learner behavior is provided by Ebbenand, Murphy (2014)

Learner retention is important as a measure of MOOC victory since only those learners who persist with a course have a chance of deriving the intended educational benefits of the learning experience.

*MOOC learner retention*

The authors have put some light on the expanding literature focusing on the factors which affect learner retention within MOOCs and have briefly reviewed some research works and expressed how these studies are limited and unsatisfactory. Firstly, the author mentioned the works regarding the case study of single MOOC and then mentioned works concerning wider samples of MOOCs.

A frequent research method to use a single MOOC as a case study to look at retention factors. Liyanagunawardena et al. (2013) and Raffaghelli et al.(2015) appears to reflect the situation, supporting the data mining trend discovered by Ebben and Murphy (2014). De Freitas et al. (2015) speculate both challenging assessments and gamification elements positively affect completion, but data is not provided. Greene et al. (2015) conducted a case study focused on learner retention within a single MOOC. Here, the authors are not satisfied by the paper because more emphasis is given on the characteristics of the participants, rather than of the MOOC. The editors mentioned some studies that are starting to look at retention factors over a wider sample of MOOCs. The editors described how Hew (2014) studied three top rated MOOCs but did not look directly at retention and they did not include any lower ranked MOOCs as controls. The authors are quite impressed by the study of Reich (2014) that are based on survey from HarvardX courses and expressed the potential research ethics of MOOC data mining. The editors also discussed the limitation of a survey study conducted by Alraimi et al.(2015) and stated that even though there is increasing literature on MOOC learner retention, there are some limitations to the current studies.

*Dimensions of online learning effectiveness*

The authors discussed the reviewed work of Peltier, Drago, and Schibrowsky (2003) on the literature on distance education, further suggested that the course content is the most major factor in determining the perceived quality of the online learning experience and found it to be useful. The argument of Marks, Sibley, and Arbaugh (2005)states that researchers should study three aspects of online learning: instructor-student interaction; student-student interaction and student-content interaction. They are unable to demonstrate statistically significant effects of the student-content variables in their model. Finally, the authors expressed mixed feelings about the studies conducted.

**Research model**

To explore whether constructs investigated within earlier e-learning studies are applicable to understanding MOOC continuance, the authors proposed a research model. The factors studied are-

Instructors effects - Here, the authors have discussed the role of instructors in MOOC retention in three constructs Adamopoulos(2013), (Peltieretal.,2003), Eom et al's(2006) and these constructs are retained to hypothesize- (**H1e3)**instructor behavior (instructor-learner interaction, instructor support and instructor feedback) in MOOCs will have a positive impact on learner retention and (**H4e6)**Instructor behavior (instructor-learner interaction, instructor support and instructor feedback) in MOOCs will have a positive impact on perceive defectiveness.

Co-learner effects based on the studies done by Peltier et al.'s(2003) and Marks et al.(2005) the authors predicted that (**H7)-**there will be beneficial impact on perceived effectiveness because of learner-learner interaction in MOOCs and (**H8)** there will be beneficial effect on learner retention because of learner-learner interaction.

Based on the work of Peltier et al.'s(2007) the authors predicted that (H9) there will be beneficial effect on perceived effectiveness because of course content of MOOCs and (H10)there will be positive effect on learner retention because of course content of MOOCs and thus other predictions (**H11 and H12**) on positive effect of course structure of MOOCs on perceived effectiveness and learner retention are done. Furthermore, they hypothesized (**H13, H14 and H15**), positive effects of information delivery technology on perceived effectiveness and learners retention.

**RESULTS-**

The authors in MOOC completion stated that once the participants passed the half course they are likely to drop out and in demographic effects on learner retention significant variations are noticed in undergraduate and postgraduate groups, 79% variance in learner retention and 78% variance in perceived effectiveness.

It is wonderful to communicate that the authors should be appreciated for their work. The aim of this study is to investigate the factors which affect learner retention within MOOCs. A study of 379 learners showed that MOOC Course Content has a significant effect on retention. This work supports previous research, strengthening the role of course content on perceived effectiveness and retention. The authors were fascinated to note that the completion rate found in their study is higher than earlier studies, and one third of students completed their courses to earn certificate. The authors stated some methodological suggestions that the research method was able to show both the groups- those who dropped out and those who completed the course. Although, the work is impressive and useful, there are some limitations. To confirm the relevance of this construct in other MOOC research contexts, more work is needed. To explore a construct to capture learner experience of student-student interaction, furthermore work is needed. Moreover, comprehensive qualitative research is recommended for revealing emergent issues affecting learner retention. Finally, the focus of this research is to investigate the effect of MOOC characteristics on learner retention. the uncovering found that the perceived effectiveness and instructor interaction have an important effect on learner retention.

Yet, I strongly believe that the *Exploring the factors affecting MOOC retention :A survey study* has done a great job by presenting their work and I recommend this book to course instructors, course designers and students who are interested in further research in MOOCs.