



# A corpus-assisted discourse analysis of the use and discursive construction of URLs in MOOC discussions

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- Discursive practices in the conversation threads



- Keywords analysis of replies in comparison to initiating posts and single posts



*link*

**1 of the 59 keywords in replies**

| Learners                    | Replies | Initiating Posts | Single Posts |
|-----------------------------|---------|------------------|--------------|
| Raw Frequency               | 1393    | 539              | 941          |
| Frequency per 100,000 words | 53.96   | 22.46            | 15.28        |

# URL-posting

- Hyperlinking functions in online space
- blogs (Myers, 2009), health forum (Sudau et al., 2014; Wikgren, 2013), public consultation forum (Polletta, Chen, & Anderson, 2008), social media (Cao et al., 2015)
- information sharing
- sources of evidence for reasoned arguments, especially in online deliberation (Dahlberg, 2001) or peer discussion in online learning (Laurillard, 2012)
- Different types of sources are cited, deviated from the academic practices (Wikgren, 2001)
- Colaric and Jonassen (2001) critiqued the use of URL in learning is not necessarily thoughtful unless learners are “assessing their relevance to the intention and dissecting the sites for evidence of credibility”

# Previous Research:

- Gallagher & Savage (2016)
- *“Of the 1471 comments containing URLs, 49% (n=734) were within multi-comment threads. In comparison with non-URL comments, only 27% (n=26,599) were contained within multi-comment threads.....”*

# Previous Research:

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- *“Of the 1471 comments containing URLs, 49% (n=734) were within multi-comment threads. In comparison with non-URL comments, only 27% (n=26,599) were contained within multi-comment threads.....”*

## *http.\*/www.\** in my corpus

|                             | Replies | Initiating Posts | Single Posts |
|-----------------------------|---------|------------------|--------------|
| Raw Frequency               | 3068    | 2332             | 3438         |
| Frequency per 100,000 words | 118.84  | 97.17            | 55.82        |

# Previous Research:

- Gallagher & Savage (2016)
- *“Of the 1471 comments containing URLs, 49% (n=734) were within multi-comment threads. In comparison with non-URL comments, only 27% (n=26,599) were contained within multi-comment threads. **This could suggest that the act of sharing a URL is either encouraging discussion or is being provided in response to a comment.**”*

*http.\*/www.\**

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# Research Questions

- How learners use URLs in their discursive practices in the discussion space?
- What are their attitudes towards the URLs posted?



## Discourse Analysis

- Language in use (Gee, 2005; Fairclough 2008): turn-taking, performing identity, maintaining relationship, negotiation
- Critical Discourse Analysis (Foucault, 1985): Ideology and Power

# Some Backgrounds



|              | Number of URLs posted | Number of comments containing URLs | % of comments containing URLs | Total number of comments |
|--------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Learners     | 8838                  | 7261                               | 4%                            | 202787                   |
| Facilitators | 2356                  | 1943                               | 10%                           | 19036                    |





# Distribution in different courses



|                 | Learners  |            | Facilitators |            |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|--------------|------------|
|                 | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency    | Percentage |
| accessibility-2 | 503       | 6%         | 252          | 11%        |
| ancient-1       | 2880      | 33%        | 198          | 8%         |
| code-1          | 844       | 10%        | 95           | 4%         |
| corpus-1        | 611       | 7%         | 480          | 20%        |
| dyslexia-1      | 761       | 9%         | 300          | 13%        |
| finance-1       | 315       | 4%         | 58           | 2%         |
| management-4    | 44        | 0%         | 14           | 1%         |
| moons-1         | 905       | 10%        | 64           | 3%         |
| nutrition-4     | 608       | 7%         | 58           | 2%         |
| oceans-1        | 486       | 5%         | 598          | 25%        |
| palliative-1    | 73        | 1%         | 18           | 1%         |
| soils-1         | 808       | 9%         | 221          | 9%         |



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| dyslexia-1      | 761       | 9%         | 47           | 2%         |
| finance-1       | 315       | 4%         | 19           | 1%         |
| management-4    | 44        | 0%         | 3            | 0%         |
| moons-1         | 905       | 10%        | 55           | 2%         |
| nutrition-4     | 608       | 7%         | 37           | 1%         |
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Step 3.5, “Go online and find information about the diet of the ancient athlete Milo of Croton, and of other Pythagoreans. You will find conflicting stories about what Milo ate. What did you find out about the way ancient Greeks or Romans viewed vegetarianism?”

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# Domain of the URLs

| Learners      |           |           | Facilitators  |           |           |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|-----------|-----------|
| Domain Name   | Frequency | % of URLs | Domain Name   | Frequency | % of URLs |
| wikipedia     | 474       | 5%        | futurelearn   | 224       | 10%       |
| youtube/youtu | 529       | 6%        | youtube/youtu | 159       | 6%        |
| google        | 349       | 4%        | lancs         | 106       | 4%        |
| bbc           | 241       | 3%        | wikipedia     | 76        | 3%        |
| dropbox       | 222       | 3%        | southampton   | 71        | 3%        |

theguardian (N=161) and blogspot/wordpress (N=182).

# Corpus-assisted discourse analysis



## *link*: keyword in replies

| Learners' replies           | link  | Initiating Posts | Single Posts |
|-----------------------------|-------|------------------|--------------|
| Raw Frequency               | 1393  | 539              | 941          |
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- Collocation analysis
- Discourse analysis of selected conversational threads containing most number of *link*, *links*, and *http.\*|www.\**



# Collocation Analysis within replies



|                    | link (N= 1193)      |                 | links (N =412)      |                 |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Collocates</b>  | Collocate Frequency | MI <sup>3</sup> | Collocate Frequency | MI <sup>3</sup> |
| <b>thank</b>       | 147                 | 20.89           | 39                  | 16.90           |
| <b>thanks</b>      | 360                 | 24.20           | 82                  | 19.55           |
| <b>Interesting</b> | 122                 | 20.31           | 26                  | 15.38           |



# Appreciation and Positive Attitudes

- The Japanese, known for their longevity.[...] Both these and other historical permutations of the pyramid are shown here <http://discovermagazine.com/galleries/zen-photo/f/food-guides> and it's interesting to compare the slight differences between cultures and eras. I wonder do people from different countries need different portions when you think about differences in body sizes and food tolerances (many Japanese cannot tolerate lactose for example). [...]
- *Thank you, very good link.*
- *it is a great link, thanks.*

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/nutrition-wellbeing/4/comments/18971576>

# An ambivalent attitude towards *link(s)*

- I liked the *link* 'coat of hydrocarbon ice' in the 'short article' which lead to even more interesting links - the problem is you could just spend the day following the links.
  - I keep getting side tracked too - makes the course even more interesting but takes up a lot of time.
  - Totally agree. Fascinating links. How do you all find them? Google I suppose.
  - Agree, I have over 40 pages of notes for this week alone - this course has produced one of the largest Word Documents I've ever done :-)
  - Am onto my third folder of notes for this fascinating course. Three hours a week study, I think, is a gross underestimate if you take advantage of all the great links other students are finding. Luckily I can get printer ink at a reasonable price locally!!



## Discourse analysis:

Selected conversational threads containing most number of *link*, *links*, and *http.\*/www.\**

## Initial Findings:

- introduction of the URLs
- credibility of the URLs
- ideological crash on the importance of URLs in online discussion



# Introduction of URLs in response to posts

- I don't know if this Wikipedia *link* will be helpful to your question of what was the staple diet of the poor in Ancient Greece.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient\\_Greek\\_cuisine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_cuisine)

It seems to have been what we would term today - a healthy Mediterranean diet. I suppose the poorest might not have eaten this well and may have relied more on what they could forage from the sea and land and grow themselves.

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/ancient-health/1/comments/19900449>

- Please see <http://www.marksdailyapple.com/fats/>

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/nutrition-wellbeing/4/comments/19012212>

- You might find this *link* of interest

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3143617/Scientists-discover-Sahara-Desert-contained-world-s-largest-lake-named-Mega-Chad-1-000-years-ago-evaporated-just-years.html>

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/soils/1/comments/6333226>

# “incorrect” “Back up with link”

- Discussion prompt: “There are many other historic examples of the severe impact that soil misuse can have on society, can you identify any? What are your thoughts on these examples?”
  - The Irish Famine is such an example.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uNMGzSL42U>
    - The Irish famine had nothing to do with soil erosion, and in fact the *link* that you have posted is pure BBC propaganda and mainly incorrect.
    - [Name] , can you back that up with some *links*?

[2 more replies]

# Disagreement drifts to ideological crash on link

- it seems to me you're [...] and are making statements you won't back up. I actually have also spent a lot of time and effort investigating the climate change/ global warming question and have come to the opposite conclusion to you. Like you, I am quite highly qualified in relevant areas. Unlike you, I'm willing to give a *link* to enable others to start investigating :

<http://www.ipcc.ch>

Alternatively, these make interesting reading:

<http://energyblog.nationalgeographic.com/2010/12/21/climate-change-myth/>

<http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-> [...]

- [...] it's not up to me to provide *links* and references beyond those I've already cited...[...]

For example, even the Met Office states that there has been no warming over the last 15 years or so, despite the rise in CO2. I personally used to believe the propaganda, until I began to look deeper into the subject, did a lot of courses in subjects such as meteorology and solar science

## “No links, here, on the forums to back up what you say”

### -----Link as Expert Knowledge

- thanks for your *link* - it is worth quoting “....”
- This article is by a homeopath, a Professor of Complementary Medicine, who says
- A nice overview of homeopathy here
- 'Colquhoun' is a pharmacology Professor at UCL and a Fellow of the Royal Society.
- No *links*, here, on the forums, as I have done, to back up what you say. Sadly, your argument comes across as all bluster and is not convincing.
- So you see, it isn't just my opinion. Not only that, but we have provided *links* and all this evidence is immediately available to anyone who reads this thread . I hope that has helped other students.

# Personal situated knowledge

- I had a quick look at my last 12 months practice. Most of the "serious condition" patients I saw came AFTER they had been treated conventionally and it failed, they were left to go home, make their peace and die. Some are still alive, others had a few more pain-free months to enjoy with their families. Whether this is really due to homeopathy or not is indeed difficult to assess, and yet there is an accumulation of those patients over all my years of practice. The few who came with a "serious condition" without having been mishandled by the conventional world were mercifully told by their ethical conventional practitioners that regular treatment would only make them suffer and was not worth it. Interestingly, many are still alive or lived well for a longer time than allotted by the conventional world. I know the usual answer" anecdotal, circumstantial, not statistically valid, and my favourite one, the cherry on the top, it was probably a wrong diagnosis (for which they received harsh toxic and useless treatments!).
- Amazing that those esteemed Professors would prefer to admit a misdiagnosis rather than Homeopathy working...pathetic.

# Credibility

- Incidentally Christian you should be very wary of using *Wikipedia* as a reference source. Its open nature means that entries can be altered by virtually any one.

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/moons/1/comments/643808>

- Some of the quoted studies here are from 2000 and old research. There was the presence of high carb too which have more recently been indicated to cause very low density lipoprotein which are the "bad" part of ldl. Also these were funded by big pharma in view of supporting statin sales. Sorry not convinced.
- The newer the research, the bigger the commercial influence. If "Doctors have been reverting (yes REVERTING) diabetes-2 and heart disease through avoiding all high fat sources. See e.g. fig 2 in [http://dresselstyn.com/JFP\\_06307\\_Article1.pdf](http://dresselstyn.com/JFP_06307_Article1.pdf) See <http://drmcdougall.com/> or e.g. <http://pcrm.org/> From this it would appear we are really a low fat species." does not convince you than nothing will.

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/nutrition-wellbeing/4/comments/18980719>

# Discussion

- Users express appreciation for URLs sharing
- Link sometimes can become a point of meta-discussion when there is a disagreement.
- Link Wars
- Users are discussing about the link, so the link does generate discussion.
- Ways of displaying URLs
- for other users to decide and interpret themselves?
- Framework to suggest how to display URLs?
  - Simply display link
  - To quote or not to quote
  - To reinterpret the link
- Monitoring or filtering the URLs for learners?
- Only URL or link in replies are examined, URL in initiating vs. single posts

