



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Computers in Human Behavior

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/comphumbeh

Full length article

From sociability to creditability for academics

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 March 2016

Received in revised form

12 July 2016

Accepted 22 July 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

ResearchGate

Research performance

Websites

Social media

Research grants

Taiwan

ABSTRACT

Social networking for academic exchanges, such as through sites like ResearchGate.net, is gaining popularity among academics. This site offers many metrics (e.g. RG score and RG impact points) which have the potential to become universal research performance metrics. This paper presents an empirical survey of the top 150 researchers' grants and their RG scores among 126 colleges of management in Taiwan. Our results show a strong correlation between the research grants and RG scores if the analysis is based on the college as a whole. However, the relationship becomes insignificant for individual researchers. In addition, colleges with the AACSB accreditation outperform AACSB member schools and non-member schools in terms of their research grants and sharing research outputs on ResearchGate. The authors conclude that metrics used on ResearchGate have the potential to become formal research performance evaluation tools. However, this time has not come yet, at least based on the experience of Taiwan.

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1. Introduction

Advances in information technology have led to the rapid growth of a wide range of social media and social networking sites. Moreover, since the 1980s, there has been an increase in research on information-seeking behavior, and this has recognized the key role of informal communication in information acquisition and exchange (Case, 2002). The 1990s saw the start of initial research on the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and their interactions with society (Kling, 2000; Kling, McKim, & King, 2003; Sawyer & Eschenfelder, 2002). In this context, "Web 2.0 technologies" is the generic term for the recent generation of social media networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, ResearchGate and YouTube (McGee & Begg, 2008; O'Reilly, 2005; Cain, 2008). People adopt these services to carry out a broad range of activities, such as those related to music, marketing, travel, education, research, politics, social movements, and online learning (Ben Mahmoud, Azaiez, Bettahar, & Gargouri, 2016). By posting articles, clicking the "like" button, replying to

enquiries, seeking people with similar interests, sharing articles, and so on, users come to form online social networks in order to raise their personal influence. Social Skills are critical for communicating and interacting with others effectively and these skills were considered part of daily life by scholars (Yu, Wu, Alhalabi, Kao, & Wu, 2016), youngsters (Wu, Chang, et al., 2015; Zheng, Yuan, Chang, & Wu, 2016), firms (Wu, Shen, et al., 2015), and people with disabilities (Chin & Chang, 2010; Wang, Sandall, Davis, & Thomas, 2011).

A major aim of many systematic reviews was to shed some light on the research patterns and historical development on a research topic for research scholars with an interest in that particular research domain (Chou & Chang, 2010; Wu et al., 2012). However, as in many other professions, scholars are now inclined to turn to using social media and social networking sites, and the versatile and interactive platforms they provide, to catch up new development more quickly, and to support their activities in a real time manner (CIBER, 2010; Gruzds, Staves, & Wilk, 2011; Procter et al., 2010). It is important for scholars to increase the visibility of their research output, and thus raise their citation count, and this can have personal benefits, beyond the contributions to the wider society. Along with Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube, ResearchGate (<http://www.researchgate.net/>) is one of the most popular social networking platforms for academic exchanges. Many academics

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share their research outputs through this site and find peers with similar interests to exchange ideas with. Academic social networking sites with large user populations (e.g. ResearchGate) are perfect channels to enable research results to gain more recognition and extensive application.

In Taiwan, academic research achievements are mostly measured based on the quantity of papers published in SCI, SSCI, TSSCI and other formal channels, while academic social networking sites, which are of an informal nature, are rarely used to appraise the impact and visibility of research outputs. Tattersall (2015) also pointed out that the open peer review process may prevent academics from sharing their reviews and comments on others' research, although this method also gives more opportunities for academics. ResearchGate is a social network site for academics to create their own profiles, list their publications and interact with each other. Like Academia.edu, it provides a new way for scholars to disseminate their publications, and hence potentially changes the dynamics of informal scholarly communication. In addition, a diversity of social networking sites has led to the rapid growth of their academic counterparts, with such sites becoming increasingly important with regard to the impact and visibility of academic work.

This research aims to explore how academics and the schools, where they serve, are related to ResearchGate, from the perspectives of Taiwanese academics' research outputs in relation to projects from the National Science Council (NSC), and their sharing of these via ResearchGate. AACSB membership and accreditation are what business schools strive for since they guarantee an institution's good academic reputation. Therefore, this study will also analyze whether there are differences among AACSB-accredited schools, AACSB member schools, and non-member schools in terms of their sharing research results via ResearchGate.

2. Research background

2.1. ResearchGate

In a virtual community, members are expected to offer information in return for knowledge gained. Consequently, knowledge-sharing behavior online is an essential activity for maintaining and developing the virtual communities (Yoon & Rolland, 2012). Academic social network sites like Academia.edu and ResearchGate, and reference sharing sites Mendeley, Bibsonomy, Zotero and CiteULike, give scholars the ability to publicize their research results and connect with each other.

With millions of users, these are a significant addition to the scholarly communication and academic information-seeking eco-structure (Thelwall & Kousha, 2014). Many scientists and researchers now use social media tools for collaborative authoring, scheduling meetings, conferencing, disseminating research results and discovering new information and research ideas (Rowlands, Nicholas, Russell, Canty, & Watkinson, 2011).

Established by Dr. Ijad Madisch, Dr. Sören Hofmayer and Horst Fickenscher in 2008, ResearchGate is known as the Facebook or LinkedIn for scientists and academics, where they can share publications, make enquiries and get responses, as well as seek collaborative opportunities with other users. More than ten million academics have shared their research outputs on ResearchGate so far ResearchGate (2016). ResearchGate (researchgate.net) allows users to upload papers as well as link it to them, which facilitates information sharing and increases the visibility of one's work (Izenstark, 2014).

The services available in ResearchGate include: sharing publications, building bonds with peers for academic collaboration, asking and answering questions, looking for employment or new

staff, and obtaining statistical data. ResearchGate also employs the RG Score to assess institutions' and scholars' academic reputations.

The RG Score functions by keeping track of the sharing status of certain data via ResearchGate (based on the quantity of enquiries and responses, full-text publications and so on), such as individuals' academic curricula vitae, as well as peer evaluations of an academic's research results. A high RG Score is based on impressive personal curricula vitae, expanding social networks with one's peers, providing full-text publications, and being active in responding to other scholars' inquiries, which in turn will increase the visibility and impacts of a focal academic's research outputs. Thelwall and Kousha (2014) show that rankings based on ResearchGate statistics correlate moderately well with other rankings of academic institutions. As for individual level, Yu et al. (2016) demonstrate that the ResearchGate score can provide effective benchmarking information for measuring active researcher performance.

This research investigated the altmetrics derived from ResearchGate (<https://www.researchgate.net/>) and there are three different logical sources of such altmetrics, as follows:

- (1) RG Score: Referring to the scores calculated by ResearchGate for academics and institutions based on an algorithm that is not fully disclosed, but takes into consideration the contributions to peers' ResearchGate profiles, peer interactions and academic reputation among peers.
- (2) Impact point: The cumulative journal impact factors with regard to the publications' of a researcher. The results reflect a combination of quantity and (journal-based) citation impact when aggregated by the institution (or country).
- (3) Publication: The number of publications a researcher lists in his or her profile. This can be aggregated by the institution (or country) to generate an academic scholarly output indicator for the quantity, rather than the quality, value or impact of the traditional scholarly outputs.

In knowledge-sharing studies, the sense of identification has been found to be positively connected with knowledge-sharing behaviors (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005; Shen, Yu, & Khalifaa, 2010; Yu, Lu, & Liu, 2010).

ResearchGate has the same functions as other social media and social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, YouTube, and so on, with regard to information dissemination, sharing, and exchanges.

2.2. Management field and current research status concerning NSC projects

The National Science Council (NSC, today's Ministry of Science and Technology) subsidizes individuals for their research projects in Taiwan, and carrying out NSC projects and is thus deemed as a benchmark of academic achievement. Each year, a regular part of the budget in the NSC is allocated for university professors and institute researchers to apply for, in order to conduct research. Since the grants awarded by the NSC are an indicator of the research capability and the reputation of a university, every institution is concerned about the performance of their professors when applying for such funding (Kao & Pao, 2012). Currently, an annual budget of some 40 billion NT dollars is invested in scientific research, focusing on the social, economic and industrial developments that lay the foundation for Taiwan's continued advances in scientific abilities.

Research outputs are where academic knowledge is generated, and impact is exercised. The scholarly community regards the quantity of academic publications as a basic indicator of an author's

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