Short Communication

The Presentation of Academic Self in The Digital Age: The Role of Electronic Databases

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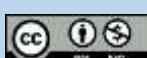
Abstract

A growing number of online electronic resources present academic work. We are not focusing here on specialised electronic databases that store bibliographic research data, such as Medline, PubMed, ASSIA, ERIC, JSTOR, but databases or social networking websites /platforms for academics/researchers that profile research, academic and professional activities, such as SCOPUS, WoS (Web of Science), Academia.edu, KUDOS, ORCiD, ResearchGate, LinkedIn, Google-Scholar and Mendeley. We discuss how databases or platforms can promote the profile of an individual academic, highlighting their research interests, grants and publications.

These databases are good outlets for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) to build, improve and promote their public profile. However, the level of efforts requires to open an account or to maintain these databases regularly can be a daunting task for some scholars. This paper outlines some of these key databases and their functions and reflects on advantages and disadvantages of engaging with the most popular ones. We remind the reader that many of these databases require academics' attention and input, and thus create more work.

Background

In the mid- to late-twentieth century, prior to the growth of the internet, publishing academics tended to receive a circular typed letter in the post annually telling them of the opportunity to be listed in a book by Marquis. If academics paid a substantial fee in US\$, they could be included in, for example, *Who's Who in Medicine & Healthcare 1997-1998* (Marquis Who's Who Inc. 1996). That was one of the few existing international databases available to university

academics. Most UK scholars, however, ignored these invitations as they were expensive.

Other academic databases accessible that time were often discipline specific and obsoleted rather quickly as they were printed and hence costly to produce. Examples included the *Register of Educational Research in the United Kingdom: Vol 11 1995-1997* (National Foundation For Educational Research in England & Wales 1998) and *Medical Sociology in Britain: A Register of Research & Teaching.* The latter was a published register of sociologists of health and illness working in the British Isles, as well as medical sociology courses at UK universities. With the support of the British Sociological Association (BSA) the editors would issue a call to medical sociologists and sociology departments. In reply they would receive information on people and relevant courses, this information received from across the country was (mostly) in paper format and the editors would compile the next edition. A major disadvantage was that this compilation process required a considerable amount of (voluntary) work and hence the register could not be updated and reprinted every year. Since the gap between editions was always a few years, each edition went slowly out of date. For example, the gap between the seventh (Barbour and van Teijlingen 1994) and eighth edition (Barbour and van Teijlingen 1998) was four years, in the interim medical sociologists listed would have developed new research interests, changed jobs, retired, and new scholars would have started; all of this information would not be available in the register. With the growing access to the internet globally, the opportunity to store and make available large amounts of information could regularly be updated. This accessibility has offered academics with the opportunity to be more visible to the outside world. Such visibility is not confined to academics but also extends to researchers, programme and policy-makers, the media and the general public. More recently, wider scholarly recognition has become an important expectation of an academic job.

Databases for Researchers/Academics

Digital platforms in general have evolved as an important societal phenomenon in the past decade or so (Marres, 2017). Savage (2013, 139) uses the term 'information capital' to illustrate the power of the digital as a new kind of resource. Similar to other disciplines (e.g. media studies, geography, and anthropology), using digital platform is 'integral to sociologists' engagement as public sociologists' (Lupton 2013, 6). The central idea is to convey sociological research findings to the public, and reaching out more globally with the use of digital platform (Lupton, 2013).

Today academics and researchers are automatically listed, or can opt to be included, in a variety of databases and social networking sites. The best known and widespread databases and social networking sites that scholars can use and modify to some extent include SCOPUS, ORCiD, Web of Science, ResearchGate, LinkedIn, Academia.edu, Google Scholar, KUDOS and Mendeley. These are briefly presented below.

SCOPUS (https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus) is an interdisciplinary publication database run by the international publisher Elsevier. It also generates an overview of the publications by an individual scholar. SCOPUS also records citations to each listed publication and generates a so-called *h-index*. One important feature of the Scopus is that it provides scholars with the platform and analytical tools to showcase and leverage research quickly. It may be very useful to identify colleagues to build a network for joint grant or publications. However, SCOPUS does occasionally generate multiple entries for the same person (i.e. you) and there is little scope for individuals to add or edit information about their personal information.

ORCiD (https://orcid.org/) provides a 16-digit digital identifier that distinguishes you from every other researcher in the world. This helps avoid confusion, for instance, whether it is *John Smith* or *Wang Li* who published a searched paper. The database is searchable by name and by ORCiD number and shows publications for that particular author. It allows you to add further information about yourself, for instance, you can add 'invited positions and distinctions'. It is becoming more common for the academic publishers and funding bodies to ask for your ORCiD ID when you submit your manuscripts or project proposals to ensure you get credit for your work. Your publications on ORCiD can also be integrated with other platforms such as Scopus or LinkedIn.

Web of Science (previously known as Web of Knowledge) (https://www.webofknowledge.com) is a website where you can access multiple databases for a range of different academic disciplines. Since it is a subscription- based database, you can only log in using your university account. You can select a database, for example, 'Web of Science Core Collection', and search by a topic, title or author. For instance, you type a title 'human trafficking', the database will generate all titles (of a journal article, book chapter or a book) referring to 'human trafficking'. This function is similar to any other online university's library catalogue. Other features include 'citation index' similar to Google Scholar and Scopus which allow to see which documents are citing other documents.

LinkedIn (https://www.linkedin.com) is one of the most popular websites, which is mainly used for professional networking, including job seekers posting their CVs or resumes and employers posting jobs. You can create your profile describing your work experience, education, training, and skills. You can also add photos, videos, and presentations, make links to and share posts with your network. It allows you to establish 'connections' with other

members worldwide who have interests similar to your areas of expertise.

ResearchGate (https://www.researchgate.net) is more of a social networking database increasingly used by researchers more recently. It allows researchers to create a profile, upload research work and find collaborations. Apart from your published work you can also upload your presentations, working papers, and research proposals. You can also ask questions or answer questions raised by other researchers from around the world. This is particularly useful for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) as they may not have published work yet. ECRs may want to share their conference papers or abstracts with other users. You can also follow researchers who are working in your area of research and beyond. Through ResearchGate you can directly contact authors and also request for their papers that are not Open Access or not subscribed to by your university library. It can also be a useful job search engine and enable you to tailor your search to get notifications by adding your job preferences, such as work location and career level.

Academia.edu (https://www.academia.edu/about) is an online database for researchers to share research papers, monitor analytics around the impact of your research and follow other researchers and academics. If you have published under a different name, Academia will search for 'mentions' of your name(s) to find papers discussing your work. You can log in to Academia.edu with your Google or Facebook account. This is an effective portal to search for grants, fellowships, and jobs in the humanities and social sciences.

KUDOS (https://www.growkudos.com/about/researchers) offers you the opportunity to provide a blurb of your article explaining 'Why is it important'? 'What is it about?' and also connects other online resources such as videos and interviews to your publications. KUDOS enables you to share your work on various other digital platforms such as ResearchGate, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. You can also import your publication list from your ORCiD ID (which saves time). By sharing your publications on KUDOS, you can see the impact on your publication metrics such as readership and citations.

Mendeley (https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/mendeley) is a popular free reference manager as well as an academic social network which helps you organise your research, collaborate online with other researchers and discover the latest research. It also helps you find relevant papers based on what you are reading. Apart from these, Mendeley helps to build your research network and can be helpful in your career development and funding.

SciVal (https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scival) provides researchers with tools to highlight the impact of their research for assessment and funding purposes. It helps

academics to visualise their research performance and impact. It enables you to evaluate your own work as well as your colleagues' research activities to visualise the data regaridn research trends and can help you to inform your decision making around research impact. There is further benefit from SciVal as it can help develop collaborative partnerships. The interactive map is an useful resource to navigate and explore potential collaboration opportunities.

Finally, most universities across the UK and abroad have their own publication management system. One example would be Bournemouth Research Information and Networking (BRIAN), which is Bournemouth University's online system for staff to record their research outputs. BRIAN is used to manage the information that appears on staff members' profile page (http://staffprofiles.bournemouth.ac.uk/). This is also a key tool for academics to maintain their record of research outputs for the national UK Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Why Should Researchers/Academics Get Involved?

Previous works show the applicability of various databases to academic scholarship (e.g. Burnham, 2006; Parmeggiani, 2009; Marres 2017; Ovadia, 2014; Thelwall and Kousha, 2013; Zaugg et al., 2011), but there are also other important aspects of engaging with digital platform for teaching and research. Digital databases have the ability to provide sophisticated and wide-reaching tools of public engagement. From our joint experiences as established researchers and as ECRs, we realised that a clever use of these databases can raise your profile and that of your institution. More than 25 years ago Miller and Morgan (1993) highlighted how constructing one's academic CV is an autobiographical practice through which selves are presented and constructed. Both CVs and electronic databases allow you to portray your academic work and make connections with other researchers outside your university or even country.

However, we realise that the practicalities of the increasing job pressures, trying to achieve your work-life balance may often make it more challenging to maintain your online presence. First, it is worth noting that not all academics want to engage in digital platforms. The nature of your engagement with such databases can be of an individual choice, perhaps depending upon what stage of the career you are at. Secondly, different disciplines and different countries seem to favour different databases. For example, a survey at the Central Universities of Delhi (India) revealed that ResearchGate and Academia were the most widely used among its research scholars (Asmi and Margam, 2018). If you decide to get involved, the important question

to consider is: 'How do you present yourself in these databases effectively?'

How Do You Present Yourself?

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), sociologist Erving Goffman, presents a theory that connects social interaction to the theatre. The central idea concerns with how people present themselves to others in the process of 'impression management'. People take on a conscious decision to reveal certain aspects of the self and to conceal others, as actors do when performing on the stage. This is very much applicable in the digital age. You can choose to represent yourself differently in different databases. Or you can opt to show certain information about yourself to some people/audiences and can tailor your preference to go 'public' or remain 'private' on various digital platforms (Goffman, 1959).

Drawing on C. Wright Mills' (1959) classic the '*Sociological Imagination'*, Housley et al. (2014), present the relevance of digital platform for social scientists. They argue that with the rise of the 'networked researcher', the chances of becoming more 'public' is inevitable (Housley et al., 2014, 15). You may find engagement with a certain type of database more useful than the other as they serve various purposes. For example, you may find LinkedIn more useful as it allows to maintain professional network, or to search for a job. It is also important to note that most of these databases are integrated within platforms, e.g. KUDOS and ORCiD allow you to link to your other identifiers such ResearchGate and LinkedIn. Whichever database you choose to engage with, the values of engaging in such digital platforms for academics in particular ECRs is without question beneficial. For a start, it is worth setting up a profile on Academia.edu, or ResearchGate at the barest minimum, and also make sure your university webpage is kept up-to-date with your latest publications, research projects and conference papers/abstracts to strengthen your online presence.

Final Thoughts

Digital databases or platform for academic and researcher can increase the reach and impact of your research, and thus help raise your profile and that of your institution. These platforms, through their analytical tools, also help you to: discover funding information, provide information or access of relevant publications; and find collaborators who may be interested in working with you on joint grant applications and/or publications. All platforms mentioned in this paper offer free registration, however, beware of extra work involved in maintaining and updating several databases regularly.

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