Exploring the relationship between the Higher Education sector and social media platforms: three perspectives

katy.jordan@gmail.com
@katy_jordan
Higher Education & social media platforms: Three angles

1. Academics’ individual use of social media, and academic identity.

2. Social media and research impact: individual and institutional views.

3. Public, institutional uses of social media: Twitter accounts and cookies.
Higher Education & social media platforms: Three angles

1. Academics’ individual use of social media, and academic identity.

2. Social media and research impact: individual and institutional views.

3. Public, institutional uses of social media: Twitter accounts and cookies.
1. Academics’ online social networks and academic identity
Personal network characteristics
Personal-professional identity

Exemplar SNS platforms

Exclusively personal identity

Facebook

Twitter

Exclusively formal, professional identity

Academia.edu

ResearchGate

Friends (non-academic contexts)

Friends (academic contexts)

Shared research interests

Shared department

Institution – other colleagues
Methods

- Online survey, during April and May 2018
- 198 participants.
- Inventory of 32 statements about examples of the types of information that academics might share through social media (both professional and personal) (Jordan, 2015; Jordan, 2017; Veletsianos, 2011; Veletsianos & Shaw, 2018).
- Structured around four sections:
  - About you – Information you include about yourself in your profile
  - Information you might include in social media posts
  - Information that you seek or topics which you discuss on social media
  - Perceived audiences at different sites
Results
Cluster 1: personal

- I use profane language
- I occasionally include geolocation information e.g. specific events
- I post about my family and home life
- I use a modified version of my real name
- I post anonymously or using a pseudonym
- I am open about my personal political views
- I post about my hobbies
- I make jokes or use humour in my posts
- I usually include geolocation information

Cartoon or picture (not a portrait) as an avatar (profile picture)

Facebook

Friends

Instagram
Cluster 2: merging selves

I post about unsuccessful applications for jobs, grants, or papers

I post information for my students

I discuss current news stories
I contribute to discussions related to academic careers
Sharing links to current news stories

Discussing topics related to academic subject area

A blog

Non-governmental organisations

I include links to my profiles on other social media platforms

I seek recommendations for papers or resources

I seek teaching advice

Non-academic communities which may benefit from your research

Current or former students

Sharing career successes

Policy makers

I seek new professional connections

I seek academic publishing advice

I seek academic career advice
Cluster 3: professional

- Photo of self as avatar
- Current or former work colleagues
- I use my real name
- I filter my language to maintain a professional image
- Academics at other institutions
- Current job position in profile
- Institutional affiliation in profile
- I include my qualifications in my profile
- I include my employment history in my profile
- Google+
- LinkedIn
- ResearchGate
- Academia.edu
- I do not have an avatar
Academic social network sites

Riding A New Transparency Wave In Science, Academia.Edu Lets Researchers Share Their Raw Data
Posted May 7, 2013 by Kim-Mai Cutler
It wasn’t until widely respected economists Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff shared the Excel files behind their influential paper on the relationship between government debt and economic growth, th Read More

Academia.edu Raises $1.6 Million To Help Researchers Connect With Each Other
Posted Apr 29, 2010 by Jason Kincaid
When it comes to academic research, it’s easy to think that academics are always privy to what their peers are up to, and are up-to-date on the latest research papers in their field. Unfortunately, t Read More

Academia.edu Crosses 5M Users And Acquires Plasmyd, A Search Engine For Research Papers
Posted Oct 30, 2010 by Kim-Mai Cutler
Academia.edu, a social networking platform for academics that’s looking to change the way scientific research is shared, just acquired Plasmyd, a search engine and discussion platform for research pap Read More

Academia.edu Raises $4.5 Million To Help Researchers Share Their Scholarly Papers
Posted Dec 13, 2010 by Jason Kincaid
Academia.edu, a social network for researchers, is having a good year. In 2011 it’s tripled its total registered userbase to 800,000, and today it’s announcing some major news that the site wi Read More

Academia.edu, The Social Networking Platform For Researchers, Raises $11.1 Million
Posted Sep 28, 2013 by Kim-Mai Cutler
For about five years, Richard Price and the team at Academia.edu have been quietly building a social networking platform for academics and researchers. For years, it was slow going. It took three y Read More

Academia.edu Overhauls Profiles As The Onus Falls On Researchers To Manage Their Personal Brands
Posted Oct 12, 2012 by Kim-Mai Cutler
Even though it’s taken for granted that you have to manage your own personal brand on the web, that still isn’t necessarily the case in the slower-moving world of academia. But it’s starting to Read More

Academia.edu Adds Analytics To Bring Transparency To How Research Spreads
Posted Aug 17, 2010 by Kim-Mai Cutler
Far away from Silicon Valley is another echo chamber in the Ivory Tower, except there’s very little transparency there about how content and ideas spread. Academia.edu, a social network for researc Read More

Academia.edu Launches A Directory Of 12,500 Academic Journals
Posted Nov 29, 2010 by Jason Kincaid
As any scientist can tell you, there are thousands of scholarly journals out there. Some, like Science and Nature, are broad in scope, covering everything from human genetics to space. Others, li Read More

ResearchGate: “Forget About Revenue Until The Network Is Valuable Enough To Command It”
Posted February 23, 2012 by Kim-Mai Cutler
Gradually, academics globally are adopting the Open Access model. Evidently, it was just a question of how long it would take. Read More
2. Social media and research impact
Perceived impacts through social media

- **Novel engagement**: research and engagement in novel ways through the platform
- **Proof of impact**: as source of evidence for funding bodies
- **Developing self**: building a professional network, career opportunities
- **New opportunities**: to find out about academic opportunities - speaking, writing and funding
- **Knowledge transfer**: informal exchange of ideas & resources between academics
- **Amplified dissemination**: of traditional academic publications
Themes by platform

- New opportunities
- Knowledge transfer
- Amplified dissemination
- Developing self
- Proof of impact
- Novel engagement

Percentage (per platform)

Blog
Facebook
LinkedIn
Twitter
• REF impact case studies database – [http://impact.ref.ac.uk](http://impact.ref.ac.uk)
• 6,637 non-redacted case studies
• Searched for 42 social media terms (13 zero)
• Exported data about 1,675 cases for analysis
• Categorised all in terms of panel and platform
• Pilot sub-sample (100) analysed in terms of how social media was used
- **Tracking of traditional scholarly publishing**: citation counts and rankings through sites such as Google Scholar and Microsoft Academic.

- **Mainstream media reflected through social media**: for example, television coverage secondarily made available through YouTube, or academic work being featured in a newspaper’s blog.

- **Other social media channels**: a wide range of third-party organisations (not led by the academics involved in the case studies themselves) which may have featured or referred to the research underpinning the case study.

- **Academic-led dissemination strategies**: encompasses a wide range of social media engagement led by the academics themselves, either as personal or project-based accounts.

- **Social media used as a way of involving participants in research**: e.g. using social media to directly communicate with participants, such as holding online discussions and soliciting feedback through social media, and also in co-production of research outputs.

- **Social media as an application of research**: a small but distinct theme, where social media platforms were cited as benefitting from the research reported in the case study.

- **Quantifying impact**: figures were often associated with social media mentions in the case studies.
3. Public, institutional uses of social media
Twitter institutional accounts

- All U.K. institutions have a presence.
- University rankings were found to be a significant predictor of several network metrics.
- Four clusters within the network.
- Ranking and geolocation appear to play a role in defining clusters.
Institutional websites and social media cookies

- Information flows - Helmond
- TrackerTracker tool from the Digital Methods Initiative

Table 1: Most frequently used cookies (used by >10% of institutional websites)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cookie</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Google Analytics</td>
<td>site_analytics</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoubleClick</td>
<td>advertising</td>
<td>90.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Tag Manager</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>80.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook Connect</td>
<td>social_media</td>
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<td>Facebook Custom Audience</td>
<td>advertising</td>
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<td>AppNexus</td>
<td>advertising</td>
<td>38.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hotjar</td>
<td>site_analytics</td>
<td>24.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter Advertising</td>
<td>advertising</td>
<td>20.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rubicon</td>
<td>advertising</td>
<td>20.0</td>
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<td>DoubleClick Floodlight</td>
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<td>SiteImprove Analytics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter Button</td>
<td>social_media</td>
<td>16.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>AddThis</td>
<td>advertising</td>
<td>15.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bing Ads</td>
<td>advertising</td>
<td>12.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>MediaMath</td>
<td>advertising</td>
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<td>Adform</td>
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<td>12.7</td>
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<td>LinkedIn Marketing Solutions</td>
<td>advertising</td>
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<td>Akamai Cookie Sync</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>Index Exchange</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>ShareThis</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Frequency distribution of number of cookies per host (institutional website).
Conclusions and discussion