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## **RESEARCH IMPACT: AN ASSESSMENT OF BENCHMARKING TOOLS AND THEIR USE AMONG PROPERTY ACADEMICS IN AUSTRALIA.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The increasing pressure on property academics to publish research papers in selected high profile journals and to demonstrate the importance of their research through the level of citation and impact is resulting in a need to continually monitor their output metrics. This paper reports on a survey of Australian property academics to assess the knowledge level and adoption of leading research output measures and online impact tracking tools. The results point to a need for greater understanding of these benchmarking tools and for academics to embrace new and innovative methods to raise their research impact and level of international recognition..

Keywords: Australia, personal branding, real estate research, research impact. ,

### **INTRODUCTION**

The world of academic research is rapidly changing with increasing pressure on academics to publish and at the same time demonstrate that their research is having an international impact. Gone are the days of lengthy research papers published after years of painstaking research and multiple reviews and rewrites. The short shelf-life of academic papers and the ability to publish and search for papers online is changing the way academics behave.

The dissemination of academic research is undergoing a significant shift from the traditional hard copy journal stored on the shelf of a library to an online presence in which research findings are available online and often well before the publication date of a hard copy version. As journals move toward the online publication of research the presence of open access (free) research journals are exerting a growing presence. The rise in the number of open access journals is being fuelled by many governments requiring grant funded research to be made freely available to the public and not locked within a subscription based journal. While the volume of open access journals continues to rise issues of research quality and international impact are becoming increasingly significant (Warren 2012)

Open access publication is occurring in two quite different formats often expressed as golden and green road (Harnad, Brody et al. 2004; Kim 2010). In the golden approach there are also two potential routes to publication, the fully open access journal which is available for free public access to all articles and usually funded by an author payment and secondly a traditional subscription journal which publishes some of its content in open access form and funded by author payments.

The alternative, 'green' approach to open access publishing occurs where an author publishes their research in a journal either open access or subscription based, but also publishes a copy version of the research on a website often operated by their university. In order to publish a version of the journal paper authors are given the "green light" by the publisher self-archive to an open access source (Harnad, Brody et al. 2004)

According to Ulrichsweb (2013) there are about 58,000 peer reviewed research journals worldwide across all disciplines and languages. The majority 50,000 are published in English. This figure is more than double the 24,000 peer reviewed research journals reported by Harnad et al (2004). The number of 'gold' open access journals has also doubled in the period since 2004 from 5% to a current 6,600 (13%) English language journals. There are also many more online only e journals at 5,800 (11.5%), although still only 22,200 (44%) are available online.

While many universities maintain an open access database with over 1,100 library members of the OAlster database of open access research papers (OAlster 2013) and 25,000 members of OCLC Worlds Libraries Connected, there are still only around 10 to 20% of articles auto-archived (Bjork, Roos et al. 2008). The extent of auto archiving is increasing as some universities move to make the practice compulsory in order to increase the impact of the published research (Gargouri, Hajjem et al. 2010).

Building on the open access and auto-archiving of research there is a rapid increase in the number of independent auto archiving web portals which offer researchers the opportunity to disseminate their research and search for papers. These profile management sites offer a variety of links to other researchers in the field or within institutions and most offer some form of ranking to illustrate the number of researcher visits and paper downloads. Along with the increasing range of publication and citation sources available the need for a uniform method of identifying and tracking an individual's researchers in a web based environment has led to the establishment of ORCID the Open Researcher & Contributor ID. Launched in November 2009 ORCID aims to solve the author name ambiguity problem in scholarly communication by establishing a global, open registry of unique identifiers for researchers (Fenner, Gomez et al. 2011).

The rapid advancement of the online research profile has the potential to separate the digitally savvy from those less familiar with the technology or less inclined to embrace the change. Higher Education has evolved in recent years and the online presence of a university now defines what the institution is and what it stands for (Wæraas and Solbakk 2009). This essential online branding does not stop at the institutional level and increasingly the personal branding of the individual academics

is an important factor in establishing an international reputation for the institution and individual's research profile (Labrecque, Markos et al. 2011)

This paper seeks to identify the level of knowledge among the academic community in Australia involved in property related research with respect to online publication and personal branding tools.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A review of the literature relating to online publication and research metrics has revealed many of the widely accepted measures of research impact and the tools available to researchers to disseminate their research and increase their research impact and citation rates through the use of open access publication and researcher identification tools.

Having established a range of available tools and techniques for dissemination of research and the measurement of researcher impact an online survey was developed for distribution utilising Qaltrics Software. The survey was distributed to all faculty members identified as contributing to the teaching and research programs at Australian Universities in the Field of Research Code 150403 Real Estate and Valuation Services (ARC 2013). The survey was distributed between December and March 2013 and a response rate of 62.5% was achieved.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The initial part of the survey sought to understand the level of awareness among academics of the most common tools used for the dissemination of research output. Then in a second question the frequency with which those tools were used by the participants was assessed.

Focusing on their individual universities participants were asked if their institution maintained an e publication repository. The majority of respondents 73.5% acknowledged that a repository was maintained, however only 20.6% indicated that they had an active account while a further 23.5% have used the repository but do not maintain an account.

The extent of use by academics of the e repository shows that 35% never use the system. The highest score was 38% access the tool 1 to 3 times per year while only 11.8% use the portal more than 6 times per year.

In a related question the extent to which the participant's institution utilises an impact measure to access their research output was investigated. In response 70% said that an impact measure was maintained although 55% indicated that they never used the metric and a further 9% accessed it less than once per year. The largest response was from those that access the measure between 1 and 3 times per year, where 21% of participants were within this category.

The next set of questions investigated the commonly used online measures of research output that help contribute to international impact and personal brand of the

individual. The results are shown in Table 1, and from which it is quite clear that a great many academics lack knowledge of many of the most common measures. In particular the result for ORCID with only 9% aware that it exists and of those just 3% with active accounts indicates a very low level of uptake. The strongest response was with respect to Google Scholar with 94% awareness and 44% active users.

Table 1 Measures of Research Contribution

Question	Don't know of this tool	Aware of	Have used	Have active account
Tomson Reuters ResearcherID	48.5%	33.3%	9.1%	9.1%
Social Sciences Research Network (SSRN)	29.4%	50.0%	11.8%	8.8%
ORCID	90.9%	6.1%	0.0%	3.0%
getCITED	87.9%	9.1%	0.0%	3.0%
academia.edu	60.6%	21.2%	9.1%	9.1%
Google Scholar	5.9%	8.8%	41.2%	44.1%
Microsoft Academic Search	69.7%	18.2%	9.1%	3.0%
Harzig Publish or Perish	81.8%	9.1%	3.0%	6.1%
Scopus	21.2%	51.5%	24.2%	3.0%

The other result which stands out is that for Scopus given its standing in the market and widespread use by most leading journals there remains 21% of academics unaware of this tool and just 27% that have actually used it.

The frequency of use of these tools largely follows the level of awareness with 44% using Google Scholar more than 6 times per year but only 3% using Scopus at this level of activity with most 27% falling into the bracket 1 to 4 times per annum.

The social media type website, getCited and academia.edu have relatively low levels of recognition as shown in Table 1 and the frequency of use is also relatively low with only 3% using Acedemia.edu more than 6 times per annum.

## RESEARCH IMPACT MEASURES

The respondents were asked to identify their awareness of and frequency of use of some of the available researcher impact metrics. Table 2 shows the results for this question and from which it is clear that few researchers are actively measuring their research impact using any of the available measures. The citation count was the only measure to have any level of user recognition with 85% being aware of the metric but again with only 3% regularly calculating this factor. Take up or indeed knowledge of the other commonly used metrics was very low with more than half of all participants being unaware of the existence of these measures let alone actively using them.

Table 2 Research Impact Measures

Question	Not aware of this	Aware but	Have used but	Regularly Calculate
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	measure	don't use	not regularly	
Citation Count per paper	15.2%	54.5%	27.3%	3.0%
h-Index	60.6%	24.2%	12.1%	3.0%
g-Index	63.6%	33.3%	3.0%	0.0%
Average weighted citations rate	54.5%	36.4%	3.0%	0.0%

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper is one of the first to look specifically at academic researchers in the property field within Australia in order to gauge their potential to achieve international impact through their research publications. As the use of online tools and techniques grows on an almost daily basis it is becoming quintessential that university researchers actively participate in personal branding in order to maintain their level of international standing.

The results of this survey of all leading academics within the field in Australia is constrained by the small number of participants but with a 62.5% response rate from the entire cohort of researchers the results do provide a clear indication of where this research area stands. It is evident that while some approaches such as university based e-publication repositories have achieved a sound level of recognition the take active use of these is still less than might be expected.

Moving beyond the home university based tools the use of the wider web-based methods of research dissemination and tracking are very poorly recognised and with few active participants.

It does seem that many academics have learned from their students that Google Scholar is a good source of research papers and citation metrics, however the use of other related tools is very under represented. It would appear from these results that if the field of real estate research is to compete with other disciplines and to raise the profile of the journals in which we publish then academics will need to take on a much more proactive role in personal branding and lifting their on-line presence in order to raise the impact of their research.

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