



Strategies to Get Your Research Mentioned Online

By Ernesto Priego



Why should you share links to your published work online, and how can you encourage others to do it?

According to Dr Melissa Terras from the University College London Centre for Digital Humanities, “If you tell people about your research, they look at it. Your research will get looked at more than papers which are not promoted via social media” (2012). Terras observed that there had been an almost immediate “huge leap of interest” on her research papers of after she mentioned and linked to them on social media:

“Before I blogged and tweeted them, had one to two downloads, even if they had been in the repository for months (or years, in some cases). Upon blogging and tweeting, within 24 hours, there were on average seventy downloads of my papers.”

Nevertheless, as most experienced social media users will know, simply sharing a link is not enough.

Make It Frictionless

Apart from questions of discipline, theme, methodology, format, type of journal, etc., there are other factors that need to be taken into account if successful sharing is the objective.

Successful sharing is, indeed, [frictionless sharing](#): the idea is that as authors and publishers we can make things easier for our readers to share.

Frictionless sharing in academic publishing can be achieved through various techniques:

- Ask your publisher and institutional repository to include a customised social media share widget, so readers can share your paper with a single click (customised share widgets will produce not only your paper’s URL, but an identifying title and other relevant metadata).
- Write about your new publications on your blog(s) and share them on social networks. Add a social media share widget to your own blog; as above, make sure you customise the text so your readers do not have to add extra information and can simply share the complete information with a single click. For personal blogs, services like [Shareaholic](#) are easy to install and customise.
- As implied above, especially on Twitter, do not merely share a link to your article, add a text that explains what it is about, and add any general metadata with a hashtag (#) so it appears on different streams around the same subject. If your paper’s title is very long, share a shorter version. Do not

hashtag every keyword, one or two are good practice.

- What works on print does not necessarily work well online. When tweeting about research, including interesting quotes from the paper you are linking to, or creating new ‘headlines’ for them can provide good results, particularly for articles with complex, long titles. Some [advice from journalists](#) can come handy.
- Trying to reduce the friction between your papers and your readers’ social networks is a recognition that it is not your readers’ job to share *your* work, and that therefore you are happy to take a bit of time to make it easier for them to do so.
- Observing common sense and without incurring in spam-like behaviour, do let your colleagues and networks know of your published research (share them the link!). On Twitter, always observe their [best practices](#).
- If you are attending or presenting in an academic conference that has a hashtag, use the Twitter backchannel to link to your related published research.
- It helps to “dig out” your previous research and share again time after it was first published and shared on social networks. This gives research a new lease of online attention life. Not everybody is online at the same time. You’ll be surprised at how far and wide your research can go.

Increasingly, for better or worse, online platforms are also turning authors into the publishers of their own work. Academia in general has not traditionally been terribly concerned with enabling widening participation and increasing access to published research. In academia, most

of the times a captive, specialised audience is taken for granted, and once a paper has been published or deposited it is left to its own devices as it were, without anything being made to amplify its distribution.

Moreover, as social media platforms become densely populated and the attention economy gets more more competitive and sophisticated, it is no longer enough to share a link: an adequate framework for online social engagement needs to be developed. Some might dislike it, but academic research does not exist outside the context of the attention economy, and like other sectors a ‘poverty of attention’ is leading Higher Education institutions to rethink how they promote what they do in the most efficient manner.

This means that academic authors are not only embracing the responsibilities of publishers, but those of journalists and PR agencies, with which academic publishing shares a place in the digital mediasphere. In fact, this can be easier than it sounds, but it requires a will to engage in different scholarly communications paradigms which are specific to the digital age.

Open Up and Make Links

When it comes to sharing a link to your published research, “the real issue is how [to] make content that’s compelling to a reader that doesn’t feel like an ad,” as [Paul Rossi](#) pointed out recently in the context of journalism. This can cause cognitive dissonance in those authors who fiercely resist the danger of dumbing research down to ensure wider readerships.

A message to take home is that helping your paper get more online attention does not require academic authors to sacrifice scientific rigour and intellectual depth. What it does require is the will to harness technologies and strategies that might be new or even scary at first.

Sharing links to your published research online is an important aspect of open scholarship. In a keynote lecture for the Association of Learning Technologies [[slides here](#)], Dr Terry Anderson suggested a list of the strategies that open scholars engage in. According to Anderson, open scholars do not only “create” (conduct research, write it up, publish it) but also, amongst others,

- self-archive
- filter and share with others
- publish in open access journals
- comment openly on the works of others
- build networks.

Furthermore, in *The Digital Scholar: How Technology Is Transforming Scholarly Practice* (2011), Dr Martin Weller from The Open University recommends open scholars to adopt the following characteristics (among others):

- Have a distributed online identity – using a variety of services an identity is distributed depending on the means by which the individual is encountered.
- Have a central place for their identity – although their identity is distributed, there is usually one central hub, such as a blog, wiki or aggregation service page.
- Have cultivated an online network of peers – the open scholar usually engages in social networks through a preferred service (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) and regularly contributes to that network.
- Engage with open publishing – when formal publications are produced open scholars will seek an open publishing route for their dissemination.
- Create a range of informal output – as well as producing

traditional outputs, the open scholar produces and explores different forms of output such as video, podcast, slidecast and so on.

- Automatically create and share outputs – the default position of an open scholar is to share outputs, be they presentations, ideas, suggestions or publications, using whatever route is appropriate.

Indeed, the first step to increase the chances of getting your research mentioned online is by being a participant in online networks; the second one is to ensure that research is actually accessible. (Do not assume that those interested in your research will always have institutional access; most journalists today [look first](#) at social media sites to find sources and stories). Each network or platform will have different rules of engagement, and it is possible these rules change over time as well. Experience, trial and error, learning from others, observing and following suit remain key elements for achieving an effective online presence.

The last [20 years](#) of published research on open access publishing have shown that papers on open access journals have a higher citation impact (as reported by Hajjem, Harnad and Gingras, [2005](#), often as high as 172%), and audiences might be more willing to openly share research which is openly available. Since most scientific research is still published in subscription-only journals, self-archiving, when legally possible, offers an excellent alternative and an academic author should not be shy about promoting any work openly available on repositories or other sites.

Whereas “publish or perish” used to be the dominant dictum of academic or scientific research, “promote what you publish or perish” is becoming the norm. General practices of open scholarship might help ensuring

papers do not remain forever dormant, unread and uncited, not shared by anyone on the online social networks that increasingly define much of contemporary social interaction. Under the current technical frameworks, authorial awareness that only research that has a stable identifier such as a [Digital Object Identifier](#) or other stable reference such as an [arXiv](#) or [PubMed](#) ID will be basic to ensuring that any attention paid to your work online gets tracked and potentially measured.

Share Alike

Perhaps the most important strategy is to remember that nothing will come of nothing (or of very little). As Dr Martin Weller points out,

“You are only likely to get a response from your network if you have in turn been open. [...] Reciprocity is essential in maintaining an effective network of peers. Using blogs and Twitter as examples, the relationship between a blogger and a reader is maintained if the blogger provides interesting and regular updates. This notion of reciprocal, but not identical, activity can be used for more subtle interactions, what might be termed ‘shifted reciprocity’.”

Through the [Altmetric Explorer](#) we have seen that papers with a high Altmetric score in context had often been shared by their own authors. These authors, who took the time to share their papers themselves, often belong to scholarly fields that collectively make an effort to engage in reciprocal, but not identical, online activity. (For some examples, see our previous [Fieldwork](#) posts).

We would argue that a condition for quality engagement is, indeed, ‘shifted reciprocity’. Through the article-level details pages the Explorer provides (like [this one](#)), authors can find who is mentioning research in your discipline on Twitter, and therefore it works as a

tool to detect like-minded individuals who could potentially be interested in your own research.

Alt-metrics and online attention to scholarly papers are the expressions of socialised subjectivity. According to Martin Thayne ([2012](#)),

online social media services enable and promote forms of individual expression within a networked environment, facilitating an ongoing process of becoming through the interpersonal, socialised interactions which users engage in.

Socialised subjectivity implies a collective effort of communication; expression, transmission and reception. Whether it is a lonely voice in an uninhabited desert or many individual voices in an overcrowded space where everyone is talking at the same time, being heard, listened to and corresponded will be hard.

Joining social networks for the first time at the current stage of their development might seem daunting for many, which is why many still feel that social media adoption is a generational thing that excludes many scholars. (If the [‘Researchers of Tomorrow’](#) British Library/JISC report proved something is that younger scholars are not necessarily the only ones using social media for research). Engaging in online scholarly communications, even for newcomers, should not be daunting, particularly in developed nations where access to ITCs is not a problem.

The real obstacle is cultural. From the 400,000,000 tweets a day Altmetric gets, 10,000 contain links to academic papers. Academics of some disciplines will have to work harder at not only sharing their papers online, but at developing a stronger community of academics sharing papers online.

Some [research](#) suggests, for example, that highly-tweeted papers have a higher number of citations (so that's some encouragement for you). Promote other people's research as you would like your own work to be promoted (again, do not forget to link!).

Ultimately, alt-metrics will only achieve its maximum potential as a result of a collective cultural effort in which research papers are mentioned (linked to) on social media as an act of collegiality.

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