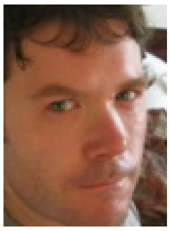
Continual publishing across journals, blogs and social media maximises impact by increasing the size of the 'academic footprint'.

by Blog Admin October 26, 2011

If we start to see publishing as both multi-stage and dialogical, impact becomes more a matter of engagement than broadcasting. In their concluding 'Site or Cite' post, ***Pat Lockley*** *and* ***Mark Carrigan*** *write that the tools used in continual publishing provide accessible quanititve metrics which could be easily legitimised.*



'Site or Cite' was, and remains, a terrible pun about how to publish the outputs of research so as to maximise their potential impact. Exactly what could constitute 'best positioning' is a complex matter, encompassing issues such as the discoverability, availability and accessibility of publications. Advocating Twitter as a panacea ignores the fact that, much as MySpace has withered, an equivalent risk remains inherent within all media forms, including the journal. Unreserved and unqualified favouring of one platform over another does little but to force our choices onto those who may well not appreciate or understand them.

Can social media versus journals be seen as some form of platform war, with the winner not necessarily the best format, but merely the most popular? Before the X Factor was bequeathed to us, the opportunities for artists to gain exposure were entirely different to those we see today. Similarly serious debates over *impact* must now engage with the Brian Co-X factor – how can academics who aren't telegenic former rock stars possibly compete? There are a plethora of choices faced by researchers when considering how to thrive professionally and personally in this changing media environment.

Managing impact isn't purely a matter for individual academics though. Universities spend thousands of pounds a year running services to highlight the research outputs of their academics. However unlike the REF, much of the impact of this is factored into the expenditure. Simple comparisons between services can reveal stark differences, such as betweenaninstitutionalrepositoryanddocumenthostingwebsite "scribd". Research and knowledge live within an 'ecosystem', and as covered in the lastpost in the series, there are inevitably economies of scale in discovery, given the advantages of having your work situated near similar content. So too in being on sites people visit. LSE has, via this blog (and its wider family), made a substantial effort to maximise the value of this. So too has Warwick's KnowledgeCentre. Both show how universities themselves are, albeit unevenly, exploring this uncharted terrain at an institutional level.

With this institutional activity as a backdrop, researchers are free to publish material in other forms suited to their individual preferences, utilising the web (and web platforms) to seek impact in different ways. Citationsforcrowdsourcedsoftware now occur in journal papers, addingcoursestoWikiversity or use of a site such as github, most commonly used by open source software developers. If you think github is an unsuitable analogy, look at the impactgraphfeature for a project. 'Publishing', as traditionally conceived, is but one part of the academic process in which impact could be sought. The widespread uptake of social media tools, as well as increasingly institutional support for the platforms they give access to, creates an opportunity for us to 'open out' our conception of the publishing process.

Perhaps it's time to move from 'theCathedraltotheBazaar'. These metaphors from the open-source software movement refer to contrasting models of software development. In academic terms we might see them as referring to distinct orientations towards publishing: one which works towards the intermittent, largely private, production of one-off works (papers and monographs → cathedrals) and the other which proceeds in an iterative and dialogical fashion, with a range of shorter-term outputs (blog posts, tweets, online articles, podcasts, storified conversations *etc*) standing in a dynamic and productive relationship with larger-scale traditional publishing projects: the 'cathedrals' can be something we build through dialogues, within communities of practice, structured around reciprocal engagement with publications on social media platforms.

Construing the research and publishing process in such a way inevitably leads to a reconceptualisation of related notions: not least of all 'impact'. As an example, a service such as klout offers a way of gauging the impact of Twitter users. Doing analysis of this blog's "social science" list on twitter, potentially different "impact" patterns could be proposed. Niall Ferguson has almost 20000 followers, but follows no one, and of his last 200 tweets not one was a reply. Ferguson has had 285 retweets however, compared to Mark Carrigan's retweet total of 617. If we see the publishing process as both **multi-stage** and **dialogical** then impact inevitably starts to seem less a matter of *broadcasting* reach and more a matter of productive *engagement*.

The tools utilised in the 'continual publishing' process all provide easily accessible quantitative metrics of the sort which could, were they to become more recognised, easily permit their recognition and legitimisation by institutions. Open working as a form of continual publishing maximises impact by increasing one's 'academic footprint' across the full range of potential platforms. It also helps overcome the problems of intellectual over-production we talked about in part 1 in terms of both expanding our conception of what 'publication' entails and broadening the range of platforms we utilise in these activities. It offers, analogously to the open-source movement, a collaborative and non-hierarchical alternative to existing models of intellectual production which may, potentially, lead to better outputs and a more rewarding working life.

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