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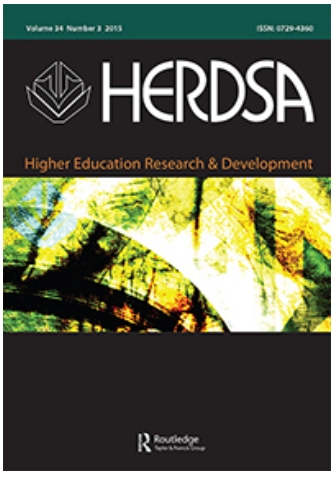

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POINTS FOR DEBATE

Does 'get visible or vanish' herald the end of 'publish or perish'?

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In the contemporary higher education environment, the academic philosophy of 'publish or perish' is being challenged. 'Publish or perish' refers to the pressure in academia to develop and sustain a research career by disseminating research findings in peer-reviewed journals. The philosophy was first documented in 1942 (Garfield, 1996) yet its origins date back to 1665 when peer review was first used as a form of quality control to distinguish scientific journals from book publishing (Tobin, 2002). Peer review remains a principal procedure for judging the quality of research, and weeding out 'the charlatans, the misguided, and the fools' (Gad-el-Hak, 2004, p. 61).

The academic publishing process is important for communicating research findings and demonstrating research quality, and has remained an academic imperative encouraged by research funders and institutional leaders (Colquhoun, 2011). Professional recognition is achieved by publishing in high reputation journals that are regarded as prestigious. Academia tends to reward those with the longest CVs and the most publications (Neill, 2008). Yet there are multiple issues with using academic metrics for determining research quality.

For example, citation analysis is regarded as a poor substitute for qualitative review and peer assessment (Nightingale & Marshall, 2012) and focusing on impact factors may be a disincentive to pursue innovative research that has longer publication timeframes (Alberts, 2013). Quantity does not imply quality and as Gad-el-Hak warns, 'counting the publications of individuals should not be used to evaluate them' (Gad-el-Hak, 2004, p. 61).

The emphasis on publishing, that worked well for many decades, has now deteriorated into a bean counting exercise with academics racing to publish *en masse* (Gad-el-Hak, 2004). The scholarly communication system is 'choked with the never ending deluge of publications' (Satyanarayana, 2013, p. 4). In 2006, the total number of peer-reviewed papers was estimated to be 1.3 million (Bjork, Roos, & Lauri, 2009). By mid-2012, estimates increased to 1.8–1.9 million articles per year published across 28,100 active scholarly peer-reviewed journals (Ware & Mabe, 2012). Journal papers are typically 3000–10,000 words in length (Bjork et al., 2009) and take much time and energy to prepare, review, read and evaluate (Bauerlein, Gad-el-Hak, Grody, McKelvey, & Trimble, 2010). There are concerns that the pressure to publish may now be compromising quality. In recent decades, there has been a notable increase

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in the number of redundant and poorly researched publications, and an associated misuse of human and fiscal capital (Bauerlein et al., 2010). Any system that encourages over-publication is destined to produce 'mediocre, forgettable arguments and findings' (Bauerlein et al., 2010, p. A80).

The possible demise of 'publish or perish' is not only due to a less-than-perfect publishing environment and a proliferation of publications, but to a contemporary Higher Education environment that is very different to the one that existed when 'publish or perish' was initially documented.

First, universities are expected to deliver benefits to society (Cuthill, O'Shea, Wilson, & Vijoen, 2014) and claims about research making a difference must now be substantiated (Greenhalgh, 2014). The sharing of knowledge between researchers and practitioners is integral to bridging the research-practice gap and achieving evidence-based policy and practice (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2003). The open access movement supports knowledge sharing and is impacting the traditional subscription model for publishing research with many funders now requiring outputs of publicly funded research to be made freely available (Van Noorden, 2013). An increasing number of journal articles are now being made openly available on the Web by publishers. Studies show that 17% of articles published in 2011 were openly available within one year of publication (Laakso & Björk, 2012). The Directory of Open Access Journals (2014) has grown steadily and lists just under 10,000 journals with about half of these added since late 2010 (Reich, 2013).

Second, digital technology has changed the way universities and academics operate. The World Wide Web and the information revolution have altered the way information is distributed and discovered. Academics have become more strategic in a crowded knowledge marketplace. The Web provides a range of options for disseminating research findings through electronic publishing to facilitate the work of the highly connected digital scholar (Weller, 2011). Options for scholarly communication include web pages, blog posts, open access publishing and social media such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, SlideShare and YouTube. Altmetrics (or 'alternative metrics') complement citation analysis by assessing the online influence of academic research output (Nightingale & Marshall, 2012).

Third, the definition of research quality is still very dependent on the peer assessment of research, which is currently delegated to those reviewing journal articles. Although the peer-review process has evolved over 350 years, there are mounting criticisms levelled at its unreliability in objectively assessing research and the increasing costs of managing the system (Satyanarayana, 2013). It is possible that digital technology may improve the process. Online review systems have reduced the time between submission and first decision, and enhanced academic rigour by enabling manuscripts to be more easily assigned to a larger number of relevant reviewers (Tobin, 2002). And there is increasing interest in post-publication peer review afforded by online publishing as a viable and cost-effective supplement to pre-publication certification (Hames, 2014).

In many ways, 'publish or perish' is a victim of its own success. It is unsurprising that a number of alternative philosophies have been popularised across the same online networks heralding the demise of the traditional approach to academic publishing. 'Get visible or vanish' (Lamp, 2012) and 'promote or perish' (Tsitas, 2013) have been proposed as more relevant alternatives to 'publish or perish'. Other suggestions include 'be discoverable or die' and 'be cited or suffer' (Enslin, 2013).

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But are academics ready to let go of 'publish or perish'? The promotion process still favours print publications (Borgman, 2007) and there are concerns that dissemination via social media may privilege speed over depth (Mendel, 2014). Perhaps the Web needs more time before it can replace the traditional method of peer review of publications, or perhaps we will eventually see a blending of the two?

In the looming shadow of the impact agenda, a better understanding of how research impacts society would make it easier for academics to release themselves from the 'publish or perish' imperative to embrace a broader approach which actively seeks to support positive real-world impact. In a Higher Education environment characterised by co-production of knowledge, digital scholarship and community engagement, the research impact/research quality nexus is more complex and more important than ever before.

The philosophy of 'get visible or vanish' is gaining momentum. But is it the new academic mantra? Are bibliometrics and altmetrics able to replace the traditional peer-review process in assessing research quality? Perhaps the tongue-in-cheek Kardashian Index (Hall, 2014) – that measures the discrepancy between a scientist's publication record and social media profile based on comparing numbers of citations and Twitter followers – isn't so crazy after all?

Is 'being visible' enough to sustain an academic career in a sector embracing the digital revolution yet still dominated by ancient traditions?

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