

WHY SHOULD YOU PARTICIPATE IN SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR RESEARCHERS?

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Recently the number of social networks has increased exponentially, as well as their applicability. These new applicability allow to classify the social networks in some systems, among which the social networks to improve health¹. Within these social networks that aim to improve the quality of people's health, there is the social networks designed specifically for researchers, which is called in this text "Scientific Social Network Internet" (SSIN).

Among the SSIN currently active, some seems to be well known like: ResearchGate, ResearchID, ORCID, Academia.edu, BiomedExperts and Mendeley. According to a study performed by Nature, these networks are used by millions of researchers, being the ResearchGate the SSIN with more users². Each of these SSIN has its own characteristics, however all share two common goals: to improve information flow and enable collaboration among researchers³.

The use of these SSIN has many advantages and limitations that have been discussed in academia, the main advantages and disadvantages are discussed below. Among the advantages, the most important is the ability of social networks to liaise and facilitate collaboration among researchers, and consequently improve the methodological quality of the research. Would not be better for everybody, if all researchers in a given area collaborate among

themselves?

I answer this question without fear of retaliation. I am quite sure it would be better for development agencies, which, in Brazil, never had many funds. For example, between 2001 and 2008, some Brazilian researchers were working to find solutions to the dengue epidemic, based on published articles from those researchers, many of these research groups performed their research isolated⁴. These researches could be allocating resources to solve the same problem, because of communication failure of Brazilian funding agencies. At this particular point, international development agencies, such as the Wellcome Trust, strongly suggests to work collaboratively and share the data with other researchers⁵.

Consequently, the realization of works in large collaborative groups would be better for society, because in Brazil they are the main sponsors. Furthermore, these collaborations would be better for the methodological quality of the research, because when many researchers are looking to the same problem, they could help to identify constraints and potentials of the study. However, it would be naive to say that SSIN will be largely responsible for these collaborations, given that the main agent to make this possible are the researchers themselves, sometimes

with their inflated egos, renounce participate in networks or work with some colleagues.

The second advantage would like to point out is the need to publicize the articles and not only to publish⁶. Unfortunately the researcher career, to be considered successful, needs to be rated. These rates may be based on various aspects, such as number of articles published in a period, the impact factor of the journals in which the articles were published and the number of citations, being the number of citations the mostly used metric^{7,8}. Considering that the quantity of citations is the main metric, it was demonstrated that the articles in SSIN, particularly in Academia.edu, has increased the number of citations 5 years in about 69%⁹, showing that these tools are fundamental to improve the assessments of researchers. Furthermore metric that analyses the number of downloads and reads of the articles are being used to evaluate researchers, and these measures can be easily found in SSIN, like in the ResearchGate¹⁰.

Among the negatives points about the use of SSIN, I would like to highlight two: the first point that worries me most is the time spent to carry out this activity. A recent study revealed that academics spend less of their time actually engaged in research, and a considerable part of their time performing administrative tasks, because of this, I believe the addition of another task to researcher activities could result in the loss of time to carry out the research itself¹¹. Furthermore, as stated earlier, many researchers already use the SSIN², then the time to perform these activities might not significantly engage the researchers.

Some researchers, who gave the rights of an article to a publisher share their articles without consulting the terms of copyright transfers, because of lack of information. However, I believe that in a not too distant future, all knowledge generated will become freely accessible, thus ending some copyright policies, which eventually is abusive.

In my point of view, considering the positives and understanding that the negatives are not completely negative, understanding that researchers need networks to improve the quality of the knowledge produced, given that millions of researchers already use these SSIN, and the competitive society that we

live in, where the agencies constantly evaluate us, with no doubt, the SSIN is already part of research.

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