Academic Social Networking: Beneficial or Not?

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Academic Social Networking (ASN): Beneficial or Not?

There are many online sites that are designed to foster social networking among scholars. These sites are different from mainstream social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace etc. ASN sites allow scholars to create profiles, indicate research interests, discipline(s) and sub-discipline(s), and the institutions and departments with whom they are affiliated. Individuals can post website links and articles, monographs, and blogs they have authored. They can also view links to websites, books, book chapters, peer-reviewed articles, conference presentations, pre-prints, and PowerPoint presentations posted by others. Scholars can search and network with others with similar research interests, disciplines, departments, and institutions. They can also view the social networks of other scholars.

ASN sites are beneficial to scholars because they increase users' web-presence. For instance, when registered users of Academia.edu are searched for by their names in Google.com, their Academia.edu profiles are among the top links in the search result list. This increases the visibility of scholars on the World Wide Web. ASN sites also actively nurture social networking among scholars by pushing information to the users of the sites and by providing individual user-analytics. When scholars post their papers on ASN sites such as Academia.edu, the site sends a notification via e-mail to all the registered users who are in the scholars' network, as well as scholars with similar research interests, thus promoting dissemination of publications within the relevant community. User-analytics periodically inform scholars on how many people have viewed their publications, blogs, and websites; the locations and affiliations of the viewers of their publications; and when the publications and websites were viewed. Thus, this feature enables scholars to gauge the popularity of their scholarly work, in addition to learning the number of times their work has been cited by others.

There are a few popular ASN sites that are used by scholars from all over the world such as Academia.edu, Mendeley.com, and ResearchGate.net. On June 18, 2014, Alexa.com gave Academia.edu a Global Rank of 1,777; ResearchGate was ranked 2,373; and Mendeley was ranked 22,156. Global Rank on Alexa.com estimates a site's popularity. "The rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors to the indicated site and page views on the indicated site over the past three months" (Alexa.com).
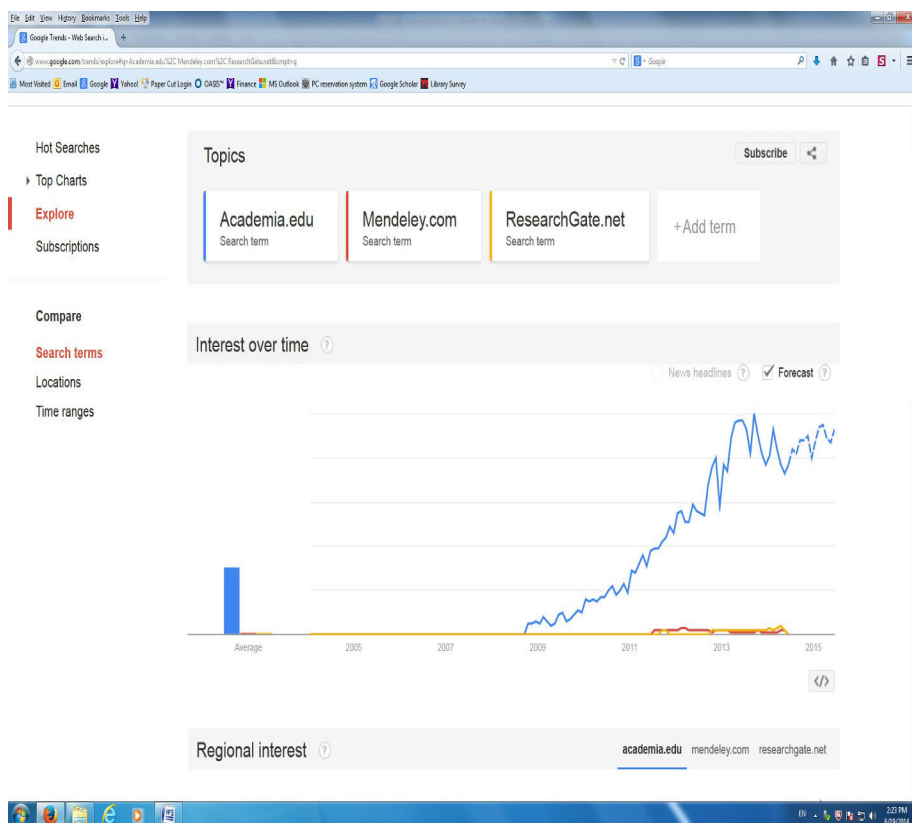
However, it is worth noting that not all ASN sites are equally popular among scholars of all disciplines. This is because the social, political, and cultural environments of disciplines affect the type of ASN sites that are adopted by the scholars in a particular discipline. As shown in the Google Trends graph on page 7, the popularity of these ASN sites is expected to grow. This trend is more obvious for Academia.edu (blue line) because the site has more users than Mendeley and ResearchGate because it attracts scholars from a wider variety of disciplines.

Prof. Anamika Megwalu
Coordinator of Electronic Resources & Library Webmaster

Conference Report: 13th Annual Information Literacy Summit

Professor Anamika Megwalu and I presented a paper titled "Next Generation Literacy: Connecting the Everyday to the Academic," at the 13th Annual Information Literacy Summit hosted by DePaul University Library and Moraine Valley Community College Library. Held on April 25, 2014, at the Moraine Valley Community College, Los Palos, IL, the conference was themed "Into the Next Generation – The Future of Information Literacy."

Our presentation focused on two exercises we use in our information literacy classes to foster transliteracy, that is - the ability to derive value and create transferable knowledge through the use of a multitude of digital platforms and information sources.

Other definitions of transliteracy include:

"the ability to read, write, and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media…" - Sue Thomas, et. al. "Transliteracy: Crossing Divides." *First Monday* (2007)

"a holistic integration of the ways in which we utilize various mediums to access information and make meaning." - Tom Ipri, "Introducing Transliteracy: What Does It Mean to Academic Libraries?" *College & Research Libraries News* (2010)

the synthesization of multiple literacies – Nancy Trimm. "Not Just Literate, but Transliterate: Encouraging Transliteracy Adoption in Library Services." *Colorado Libraries* (2011)

To foster transliteracy, Professor Megwalu encourages college students to begin their research with familiar web sources such as Wikipedia, blogs, and social networking and file sharing sites, before they use academic databases. In my information literacy sessions for high school science research classes, students learn about scientific research by reading about studies in the *New York Times*. Such activities encourage students to exploit everyday information sources for their academic work.

To learn more about our presentation and to see descriptions of the conference breakout sessions, go to: http://informationliteracysummit.org/

Prof. Christina Miller
High School Librarian