



Digital Scholarship from the Periphery: Insights from Researchers in Chile on Academia.edu and ResearchGate

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COLLECTION:
SOCIAL MEDIA IN
HIGHER EDUCATION:
WHAT'S HAPPENING?

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ABSTRACT

The digitization of academic practices has transformed how research output is shared and discussed, with academic social network sites (ASNS) like Academia.edu and ResearchGate emerging as pivotal platforms. However, their uptake and implications in contexts like Latin America still need to be explored. This study examines the emerging tensions related to using ASNS (Academia.edu and ResearchGate). As such, it offers a qualitative data analysis from 28 interviews with Chilean university researchers. It focuses on three emerging and overlapping tensions: the quantification of research via altmetrics, reputation building, and self-promotion. The findings underscore that altmetrics -despite providing a broader view of research impact- can mirror and perpetuate the problematic aspects of academic capitalism. Digital reputation, tied to high scores, conflicts with more qualitative aspects. The observed ambivalence towards self-promotion exposes a tension between the traditional scientific ethos and academic capitalism. Ultimately, this research unveils the multifaceted implications and paradoxes introduced by these platforms in the Chilean academic milieu.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid global shift in higher education (HE), fueled by market logic and the surge of digitalization, is transforming the academic landscape. As universities adapt to this new era globally, academics are integrating innovative teaching methods, engaging in global partnerships, and increasingly relying on digital platforms for research, instruction, and administration (Carrigan & Jordan 2022). In this context, the adoption of academic social networking sites (ASNS), such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate, to share research output has become central to current scholarly practice.

The uptake of digital platforms for research-oriented purposes, underpinned by principles resonating with the open access movement, has received extensive attention in developed countries, especially European ones (Chugh, Grose & Macht 2021; Pearce et al. 2010; Veletsianos & Kimmons 2012; Weller 2011). However, their impact on peripheral HE institutions, particularly in Latin America, remains evidently less explored (Constantino, Raffaghelli & Teijeiro 2015; García-Peñalvo 2018). In Chile, digital identity management has started to become an imperative in the scholarly community (Brunner 2017). Yet, empirical inquiries remain scant on how Chilean researchers navigate, utilize, and perceive ASNS in their day-to-day academic lives.

This paper aims to bridge this research gap by exploring academics' experiences using these platforms. Its objective is to examine the emerging tensions associated with using ASNS, contextualizing these experiences within the larger context of academic capitalism (AC). Employing a qualitative lens, 28 scholars were interviewed from diverse Chilean universities who were engaged in either Academia.edu and/or ResearchGate. By examining phenomena such as the quantification of academic work, reputation-building, and self-promotion within ASNS, we aim to contextualize these dynamics within Chile's distinct, market-driven educational landscape. Such exploration not only enriches our understanding of digital scholarly practices in an unexplored setting but also underscores the broader implications of AC in shaping modern academic identity.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

ACADEMIC SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

One aspect of digital scholarship that has attracted attention in the scholarly world is the use of ASNS. Designed specifically for academic communication, ASNS such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate—boasting 228 million and over 20 million members, respectively—facilitate interactions within academia and provide a space to share publications (Academia.edu 2023; Researchgate 2023; Thelwall & Kousha 2014). Beyond sharing scholarly work, they have also contributed to shaping digital academic identities (Lupton, Mewburn & Thomson 2018) often rooted in metrics like productivity (Van Noorden 2014). These platforms are notably promising for academics working in peripheral HE systems due to enhanced visibility and collaborative opportunities (Dorantes y Aguilar 2019; Duffy & Pooley 2017).

Other studies have enriched our understanding of the motivations behind using academic platforms. Common incentives to engage in these platforms encompass networking with peers, disseminating research, monitoring others' activities, and amplifying one's curriculum (Jordan & Weller 2018; Lupton 2014; Muscanell & Utz 2017). These platforms are particularly pivotal for enhancing visibility of young academics and those on hourly contracts, given the heightened competitiveness of the academic job market (Manca & Ranieri 2016). The potential reputation-building affordances of both Academia.edu and ResearchGate have also been underscored (Herman 2018; Raffaghelli & Manca 2018; Monteiro-Krebbs et al. 2023). Thus, the importance of creating a personal brand and self-promoting on these platforms for career advancement has also been highlighted (Duffy & Pooley 2017).

A noteworthy affordance of these platforms is the integration of altmetrics, a quantifiable set of metrics that shed light on the digital footprint of scholarly work (Thelwall et al. 2013). Traditional citation-based metrics, such as Impact Factor and H-index, measure the influence of scholarly work based on citation counts in academic journals, reflecting its perceived impact within the academic community (Van Noorden, 2010). Altmetrics broaden this perspective by capturing online engagement and impact through social media mentions, blog posts and other

digital platforms, offering a more immediate and diverse understanding of scholarly influence (Ortega 2018; Uribe-Tirado & Alhuay-Quispe 2019). For example, ResearchGate devised a unique reputation indicator RG Score, ranking each user profile within its network. This score captured both the research impact and its popularity -indicating a researcher's productivity and interactions with peers (Djonov & Van Leeuwen 2018).

Nonetheless, while pioneering, the transparency and robustness of altmetrics have come under academic scrutiny. A salient critique gravitates toward the potential opacity underlying these measures, prompting concerns over potential misinterpretation and misuse, which, if unchecked, could pave the way for skewed or potentially inequitable academic evaluations (Desrochers et al. 2018; Sugimoto et al. 2017). In response to wide criticism, ResearchGate recently removed its RGScore (Research Gate, 2022).

While the benefits of ASNS are undeniable, concerns are mounting about their potential in steering knowledge towards market-driven interests and intensifying faculty work conditions (Delfanti 2021; Hall 2013; Ivancheva & Garvey 2022). Also, they have enabled increased monitoring and hypervigilance of scholarly work, owing to metadata records (Hall 2013; Lupton, Mewburn & Thomson 2018). Moreover, they inadvertently bolster the primacy of traditional print-based academic publication, thereby amplifying the culture of quantification and "publish or perish" (Kjellberg & Haider 2019). Finally, although lauded as knowledge democratizers, these platforms might replicate existing visibility disparities seen in conventional publishing, particularly regarding gender and scholars in marginalized regions (Greenhow, Gleason & Staudt Willet 2019; Sugimoto et al. 2017).

Regarding the Latin American context, studies have shown that the uptake of ASNS trend is incipient and growing, albeit unevenly distributed across the region (Andrea et al. 2022; Artigas & Casanova 2020; Campos-Freire, Rivera & Rodríguez 2014). Though this adoption trend remains in its formative phase, the discourse surrounding the utility of ASNS has significantly intensified (Artigas & Casanova 2020), particularly in the wake of the recent challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant push for digitalization. This heightened discourse mirrors the broader shift in Latin America over the past two decades, wherein scientific production has been strategically prioritized. In this vein, scholars have called for training in digital literacy skills for academic staff as the lack of knowledge of these platforms has been noted (Basantes-Andrade et al. 2022; García-Peñalvo 2018). Furthermore, the peripheral status of the academic profession in Latin America has been recognized, as outlined by Marquina (2020). Many academics in the region perceive themselves as operating on the margins of the international academic sphere, often feeling subordinate to dominant academic centers that dictate research and professional standards. Given these dynamics, a detailed exploration of the ASNS phenomenon within Latin America's academic context becomes both relevant and imperative.

A BRIEF NOTE ON THE CHILEAN ACADEMIC CONTEXT

In recent years, the academic profession in Chile has undergone significant transformations, reflected in the evolving nature of the roles and expectations within its higher education (HE) system. In a recent study, Bernasconi et al. (2021) identified a pronounced trend in the academic profession: Chilean academics have transitioned from predominantly teaching-centric roles to more harmonized teaching-and-research profiles. Despite only 27% of faculty fitting this profile, these research-focused academics often hold positions of high prestige and influence, shaping the trajectory of the academic landscape in alignment with their ethos. Notably, the academic community is distinctly stratified, with a core of research-driven academics contrasting with a larger group primarily focused on teaching, many on precarious hourly contracts (Marquina 2021; Simbürger & Neary 2016). The last decade has seen a surge in doctorate-holding academics in Chilean HE, driven by policies focusing on human capital development, leading to a rise of younger academics facing employment instability (Chiappa & Labraña 2023). In terms of research outputs, Chile has notably risen to be ranked third in the Latin American region, bested only by Brazil and Mexico (SCImago n.d.).

This evolving academic profession in Chile is situated within a broader framework of academic capitalism (AC), as conceptualized by Leslie & Slaughter (1997) as the implementation of market-oriented behaviors into the workings of universities and academia, particularly in

terms of the commodification and commercialization of knowledge. Indeed, the Chilean HE system stands out as a distinct peripheral form of AC (Brunner 2017), which integrates a significant private market provision. This shift towards AC has transformed the academic ethos, with a focus on performance metrics like the H-index over traditional peer-evaluation, and an adoption of productivity-centric management in both state and private institutions (Brunner 2017; Fardella, Sisto & Jiménez 2017). This trend towards quantifiable performance indicators has reshaped academic identities and strained traditional academic community ties (Guzmán-Valenzuela & Martínez 2016; Fardella, Sisto & Jiménez 2017).

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

To explore the intricacies of the research question: “What tensions arise from the use of scientific social networks by academics in Chilean universities?”, a qualitative approach was deemed most apt. This method, allowing for a nuanced exploration of participants’ experiences and viewpoints about their use of ASNS, stands out for its potential to uncover the depth and complexity of such tensions (Denzin & Lincoln 1994). Consequently, semi-structured interviews were employed, which allowed for some flexibility and openness within the constancy of guiding questions (Salmons 2017).

In selecting participants, I prioritized diversity across disciplines, gender, and years of experience, using a purposive sampling approach informed by prior knowledge of the subject matter. Recruitment strategies included direct messaging on Academia.edu and ResearchGate, email outreach, and snowball sampling, ensuring a comprehensive representation of Chilean university faculty with active roles in research and use of ASNS. Those interested were given an informational document outlining the study’s goals and seeking their consent.

Drawing inspiration from previous research, I developed an interview guide anchored on findings from prior digital ethnographic observations of Academia.edu and ResearchGate, as well as literature exploring the implications of adopting scientific social networks within academic settings (Jordan 2014; Lupton 2014). The guide consisted of around 15 questions and focused on participants’ perceptions and practices concerning their use of ASNS (Appendix 1). Interviews with consenting participants -conducted via Zoom- lasted from 40 minutes to an hour and were fully transcribed for qualitative content analysis.

PARTICIPANTS

By the end of the data collection phase (February 2021), following a point of saturation, a total of 28 participants had been interviewed. All participants held doctoral degrees and were involved in research and publishing. Table 1 below provides an in-depth look at the participants’ characteristics. Of the 28 participants, 13 identified as females and 15 as males. The respondents came from diverse macro-disciplinary areas, with 13 belonging to the Natural Sciences, Medical and Health Sciences, and Agricultural Sciences. On the other hand, 15 identified with Social Sciences and Humanities. Concerning career stages, a distinction was made regarding years of experience in research: early career (1–5 years), mid (6–15) and senior (+15). Notably, the mid-career stage had the highest representation with 14 individuals, followed by senior with 9, and early with 5 participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

Content analysis makes inferences by systematically identifying special characteristics of meanings in a given text (Saldaña 2013). The strategy used was an inductive approach informed by data processing, with the data being coded and organized into emergent themes. To do so, the researcher used the constant comparison process of generating, checking, and regenerating codes and themes (Denzin & Lincoln 1994). To ensure reliability, the researcher embarked on a cyclical systematic coding process, that included multiple rereading to identify patterns and themes (Duarte 2022; Saldaña 2013). With each reading codes and themes were synthesized and reduced, ultimately combining and rearranging themes into an analytic matrix with three main themes shown in Appendix 2.

CODE	DISCIPLINARY AREA	GENDER	ACADEMIC CAREER STAGE
P1	Social Sciences	F	Early
P2	Agricultural Sciences	M	Senior
P3	Humanities	F	Early
P4	Social Sciences	F	Mid
P5	Social Sciences	F	Senior
P6	Social Sciences	M	Senior
P7	Science and Technology Studies (STS)	M	Mid
P8	Natural Sciences	M	Mid
P9	Social Sciences	M	Senior
P10	Humanities	M	Mid
P11	Health Sciences	F	Mid
P12	Social Sciences	F	Mid
P13	Agricultural Sciences	F	Mid
P14	Natural Sciences	F	Mid
P15	Health Sciences	F	Early
P16	Natural Sciences	F	Early
P17	Social Sciences	M	Senior
P18	Humanities	M	Mid
P19	Health Sciences	F	Mid
p20	Natural Sciences	M	Mid
P21	Humanities	F	Mid
P22	Social Sciences	M	Mid
P23	Natural Sciences	F	Senior
P24	Natural Sciences	M	Mid
P25	Natural Sciences	M	Senior
P26	Humanities	M	Mid
P27	Natural Sciences	M	Mid
P28	Science and Technology Studies (STS)	F	Mid

Table 1 Participant demographic information.

To ensure the trustworthiness of my data and minimize bias, I adopted a rigorous qualitative analysis approach (Denzin & Lincoln 1994; Duarte 2022). This included a systematic, reflective coding process, and iterative analysis of transcripts guided by the objectives in Appendix 2. Triangulation with existing literature and theories was used for data corroboration. Transparency was maintained through meticulous record-keeping and peer validation at international seminars and conferences.

ETHICS CLEARANCE

This study is part of my doctoral investigation at Universidad de Chile. It has received endorsement from the examination committee and according to said committee it bypassed the need for formal ethics committee approval. However, rigorous measures were instated to safeguard participant anonymity, which were in the consent waiver. Every interview transcript was thoroughly anonymized, ensuring no opinions were directly linked to any participant in subsequent presentations or publications. For participants with notable public recognition, I offered additional measures to exclude any sensitive details.

A) THE QUANTIFICATION RESEARCH VIA ALTMETRICS

Academics in Chilean universities are habitually evaluated by traditional quantification tools such as the number of publications and by citation counts such as the H-index, and journal impact factor (JIF) (Fardella, Sisto & Jiménez 2017). The participants revealed a pervading uneasiness regarding the current fixation and dependency on quantitative metrics for hiring, promotion, and general evaluation of academic work. The criticism stems from various scholars across disciplines, genders, and career stages, highlighting the reductionism that translates multifaceted academic roles into mere numerical values. The interviewees' most common criticism revolves around oversimplifying scholarly contributions, overlooking other vital aspects such as teaching and community engagement, and fostering a discriminatory environment, particularly affecting women and those in precarious employment.

Moreover, an inherent tension between the relentless pursuit of publication, often described as a "publish or perish" rationale, and the diverse responsibilities and duties that academics face, especially teaching load, was revealed throughout the interviews. A senior female researcher disclosed a drastic measure taken to stay competitive in research:

"Just imagine, I had to cut down my teaching contract by half a day because I was falling behind in research, you see what I did. I mean, you can say, 'This is suicidal,' but I will not let the system run over me and dump me because if it does, I will never move up again. So, it is an extreme decision, but a very reasonable one. [...] it is soulless [the system], but you are not" [P14].

This revelation echoes a trend in the Chilean academic landscape: There has been a consistent shift toward an academic profile that is research-intensive instead of teaching oriented (Bernasconi et al. 2021). While research-focused professors might enjoy high-prestige positions in their institutions, the strong pressures around academic productivity they experience can affect the way they shape their academic identity (Guzmán-Valenzuela & Martínez 2016).

Within this context, the emergence of alternative measures via these platforms and other social media as an alternative or addition to traditional evaluation indicators is met with both interest and skepticism. These two contrasting opinions encapsulate the dichotomic nature of navigating a digitally connected global academic milieu. While most Chilean universities have not yet included web-based outreach activities in performance assessments, there are indications of a shift toward this approach. A few participants reported this emerging trend and revealed the following: "In fact, just a little while ago, the university awarded its top researchers, including the most cited according to those databases, such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate" [P18].

This nascent trend can be regarded as an adaptation to the digitized global academic ecosystem and an emulation of the trends seen in central countries (Arboledas-Lérida 2021; Robinson-García, van Leeuwen & Råfols 2018). In the same vein, several other interviewees indicated that they were aware of discussions in their research centers and universities concerning the new digital ways of assessing research impact, attesting to its growing relevance.

Given the plausible incorporation in evaluating academic work in Chile, participants' opinions on incorporating altmetrics are generally favorable. In their view, they can provide an opportunity to make visible other forms of impact and recognition in broader (albeit digital) spheres of current society, as the following excerpt shows:

"I think they are exciting metrics [...] how many times an article was seen, how many times it was downloaded, and I think that it is objective and that it clearly reflects, in the least, people's interest, and it will also reflect the size of your area, the number of people working in it obviously, but I welcome them" [P20].

This opinion echoes studies highlighting the role of alternative metrics in modernizing and balancing the current academic reward system (Desrochers et al. 2018; Haustein 2016). This positive opinion is emphasized by participants who, despite criticizing the overuse of conventional metrics, appreciated the incorporation of new indicators from social media. One female participant stated: "I believe there should be a balance. I think it is fair to consider

them, especially among younger researchers, as many are more adept with social media” [P9]. Most women participants highlighted the perceived benefit of gaining visibility by being part of these platforms. While some research has noted gender disparities (Sugimoto et al. 2017), others have voiced similar viewpoints to that of the participants of this study (Yamine et al. 2018). The fact that social media may empower underrepresented groups at least in visibility, seems especially important for certain demographics of scholars who are working in peripheral countries such as Chile.

However, the use of alternative indicators also raises some concerns. Seasoned scholars or those opting out of these platforms may be at a disadvantage when it comes to obtaining visibility in the digital sphere, and some participants raised questions about the reliability and potential manipulation of these metrics as one participant succinctly stated: “Alternative metrics can easily be manipulated” [P2]. In fact, several participants reported being aware of instances where colleagues had manipulated or gamed the metrics on ResearchGate. This phenomenon has been identified as a potential risk due to its potentially addictive nature (Hammarfelt, Rijcke & Rushforth 2016; Hausteijn, Costas & Larivière 2015).

The most critical issue is the potential personal detriment that constant monitoring of these platforms can generate. Some participants described their relationship with these platforms as addictive, emphasizing the metric fixation that can occur at the individual level (Hammarfelt, Rijcke & Rushforth 2016). Others went as far as to confess a feeling of validation expressed in the numbers they saw in their profile. One female scientist expressed a straightforward criticism stating: “When your indicator increases, then that is it; now you are a person [for the institution]” [P23]. This reflects a broader criticism of AC, whereby the emphasis on quantitative performance indicators effectively reduces scientific work and scientists’ worth to mere productivity metrics (Saura & Bolívar 2019). Reducing a researcher’s value to a numerical figure undermines the core principles of the academic profession and its ethos.

Closely related to this is a heightened awareness of the negative mental health impact that the pressure to conform to these indicators can exert. The feeling of stress derived from the social comparison of scores on these platforms that interviewees referred to has been noted previously (Muscanell & Utz 2017; Van Noorden 2014). One interviewee went so far as to label this phenomenon as ‘sickening’, highlighting the deep distress that this obsession with quantification can inflict on the well-being of academics as they get fixated on the number and on competing with their peers:

“I think it’s either for self-love or self-loathing. It’s a binary formula that forces you into constant comparison. You think, ‘Somebody else has this many points, and I have these points.’ It prompts one to question the meaning behind these numbers and the reasoning behind their calculation. I find it profoundly detrimental to the individual” [P22].

Overall, the existence of altmetrics is a contentious topic among the participants, and their opinions regarding their utility and value vary widely. These differing opinions are strongly influenced by academics’ personal experiences and beliefs concerning Chilean universities’ prevailing quantitative evaluation system of academic work and its productivity pressures. Indeed, traditional metrics still hold significant sway over the academic digital practices of the interviewed academics.

Primarily perceived as an addition to traditional metrics, altmetrics prompt a pressing debate on the quantification of academic work and the current evaluation system in Chile among the participants. The critique focuses on the harmful effects of quantification derived from AC (Fardella, Sisto & Jiménez 2017). In this view, altmetrics merely extend and deepen the quantification and its harmful effects on individuals and the broader scientific communication and production system. Participants were also wary of considering altmetrics as a replacement for traditional metrics or other more qualitative indicators of scholarly recognition. In their view, there is a risk of generating new problems and inequalities if altmetrics are equated with traditional forms of knowledge, potentially disadvantaging those not engaged with or less active on social media platforms.

While criticism abounds concerning traditional metrics, the participants did have a nuanced view of new indicators stemming from these platforms. In a way, the self-quantification was

also seen as an empowering activity, making the uptake of ASNS promising for scholars who work in peripheral HE institutions and who can now self-monitor the reach of their research outputs instantly. Ultimately, the debate and tensions around the topic of altmetrics highlight the complexity of finding appropriate evaluation methodologies that do not simply replicate the flaws of the existing system, particularly for those less engaged in social media, as is the case of Latin American academics (Campos-Freire, Rivera & Rodriguez 2014).

B) REPUTATION-BUILDING IN ASNS

In the evolving landscape of digital scholarship, the scientific reward system has undergone significant transformation, becoming intricately layered and multifaceted (Desrochers et al. 2018). Notably, the appearance of altmetrics has heightened a growing tension due to the discord between conventional evaluation methods and the emerging potential of novel performance indicators (Herman 2018). As noted, participants reported engaging in constant self-monitoring of their indicators in Academia.edu and ResearchGate. This recurrent behavior prompts questions regarding the role that these platforms might play in the construction and understanding of academic reputation nowadays.

While reputation remains an elusive term within academia (Herman 2018), within these digital platforms, it was often distilled to a single issue: having high scores. Remarking on the transformation of the academic profession in Chile, a participant commented that: “in the modern academy, scholars say ‘hey, this person has over 5000 citations, so he/she must be reputable’, and this can be seen in the platforms” [P6]. In the same vein, most scholars remarked that having an overall high score in ResearchGate, for example, was a marker of, at the very least, one dimension of reputation.

During the interviews, it became evident that altmetrics and the information found on a user’s profile often served a dual role: as a personal yardstick and a tool for peer comparison: “I look at my peers’ profiles, and it serves as a comparison to evaluate whether I am doing well or poorly” [P7]. Comparison is not as clear-cut as focusing solely on quantitative data, as some qualitative aspects are part of the academics’ assessment of their peers: “I check the type of journal, its index and the co-authors” [P4], which is in accordance with other studies in Chile (Guzmán-Valenzuela & Barnett 2013; Muñoz-García 2019). Such openly accessible and easily comparable data invariably influences academics’ self-perception, molding their understanding of progress and their ideas of reputation (Hammarfelt, Rijcke & Rushforth 2016; Monteiro-Krebs et al. 2023).

Altogether, there was no uniformity in perceptions among the academics interviewed. A dichotomy emerged in the responses: while some –albeit a minor portion of– academics remained indifferent to these metrics, arguing their uselessness for their academic promotion, a majority perceived them as a helpful validation of their scholarly impact. From this latter perspective, seeing scores rise on these platforms is a tangible and motivating validation of one’s scholarly impact. Thus, for example, an email notification that one’s work had been cited felt like an endorsement that their work had transcended the ivory tower to broader audiences: “So when I receive an e-mail that my work has been cited, I’m like “look, how nice!” I mean, it wasn’t just me and my mom reading it [laughs]” [P11]. Notably, female researchers and early-career academics resonated with this sentiment.

Indeed, a relevant finding is the perceived utility of ASNS in backing reputation and showcasing research output as particularly salient for certain demographics. Women participants, who face more obstacles and biases in their academic careers (Araneda-Guirriman & Sepúlveda-Páez 2021), emphatically credited these platforms for providing increased visibility. One female researcher underlined the value of these platforms in affirming her professional identity and competence in a challenging environment: “If I weren’t on this platform, it would be more difficult for me to assert myself and my knowledge in this field” [P10].

Yet, a vein of skepticism runs deep among the participants as many cautioned against over-reliance on these platforms to gauge a researcher’s credibility, pointing out potential data inaccuracies. Such reservations coincide with what other studies in Spanish-speaking countries have found (Artigas & Casanova 2020).

In considering the pressures of online reputation-building, another angle emerged. Some speculated that the absence of certain researchers might indicate a fear of underwhelming

metrics: “Certain authors might avoid creating profiles, fearing that their low citations might underscore their lack of prestige” [P25]. Although speculative, this observation underscores the intriguing link between online visibility and perceived academic trustworthiness.

At this point, the underlying tension surrounding the concept of reputation in the digital sphere becomes palpable. This raises a pivotal question: Is there a distinct digital reputation separable from conventional face-to-face reputation or prestige? The narrative remains muddled, but participants’ strategic use of platforms like Academia.edu and ResearchGate underscores their growing significance in shaping their academic identity digitally.

For example, some mentioned that they choose to share links to their papers from their ResearchGate account rather than from the journal websites to increase their visibility. This goes to show that there is a close connection between the idea of digital reputation and being visible online. What is more, a minor portion of participants revealed that they used the knowledge from the self-monitoring of their altmetrics –such as the now-extinct RG Score– for making decisions about research topics that might garner more attention, in order to improve their visibility and thus reputation. Such a strategy underscores a burgeoning reliance on these platforms for reputation-building, which echoes a trend of instrumental logic identified in the research endeavors among Chilean scholars (Muñoz-García 2019).

Despite the growing significance of digital visibility, most participants still held conventional indicators—such as institutional progression, community research impact, student feedback, grant funding, and field-specific and peer recognition—in higher regard for reputation-building. Taken together, these results show a complex sometimes ambivalent relationship between conventional academic recognition and digital reputation metrics. The diverse reactions signal that the academic community is in a phase of reflection and recalibration.

C) DIGITAL SELF-PROMOTION

The third source of tension identified was in relation to digital self-promotion practices on platforms like Academia.edu and ResearchGate. It is known that the platforms’ affordances and functionalities enable scholars to spotlight their achievements and make their work visible. Such practices include showcasing achievements, sharing links on other social media platforms, or even the mere act of uploading a document –potentially considered self-promotion in professional contexts.

From the interviewees’ perspectives, academic self-promotion on digital platforms generates tension. A majority conveyed apprehension, attributing the unease to the undue pressure and demands such digital self-promotion places on scholars. There’s a pervasive sentiment that such platforms benefit a certain kind of academic, typically those more digitally extroverted. This sentiment is encapsulated in a respondent’s reflection: “There are certain researchers... who are online 24/7... the university today emphasizes this kind of academic... but what about people like me? We remain completely invisible in this digital showcase...” [P1]. This echoes what others have signaled because of the increasing importance of these platforms: they have ushered in a new age where the dictums of ‘Publish or Perish’ and ‘Promote or Perish’ coexist (D’Alessandro et al. 2020; Duffy & Pooley 2017).

This expression resonates with concerns about an implicit hierarchy being created in which visibility equates to scientific credibility, pushing academics to be more digitally extroverted. Such a system might inadvertently eclipse quieter yet significant academic contributions. As another researcher poignantly noted regarding other visible colleagues: “You see their online image everywhere... [self-promotion] is a job in itself. The system, unfortunately, urges you to fall into it. It repels me a bit” [P4].

Additionally, there’s a prevalent sentiment that those individuals engaged in self-promotion might exhibit high levels of ego or even narcissism. Distinctions between self-promotion as a strategic career move versus a narcissistic trait often blur, causing unease in the academic community. One participant commented on a time when his institution encouraged them to create a profile on both platforms: “some disagreed because they said it fostered the ‘I am so amazing’ self-promotion” [P10]. Building on this, D’Alessandro et al. (2020) suggest that ASNS are not to replace the intrinsic value of quality research or the merits of academics but rather

to complement them. Scholars are offered a digital podium to market both their research and themselves, walking the thin line between necessity and narcissism.

Still, the discourse around self-promotion is far from being purely negative. Many respondents, despite their reservations, acknowledged the pragmatic necessity of digital self-promotion in the contemporary Chilean academic landscape marked by intense competition, precarious employment, and an institutional shift towards promoting their institution and staff via social media (Brunner 2017; Fardella, Sisto & Jiménez 2017). This was succinctly captured by a senior researcher who pessimistically remarked that “competition is the daily life of academia” [P25], and thus, engaging in this behavior is a must. Another respondent stressed the imperative of self-promotion, stating that nowadays, “you have to show off, make yourself heard, you have to showcase what you do all the time” [P10].

A subset of participants expressed resistance to self-promotion, emphasizing that they valued their contribution to collective knowledge over personal gain or individualism. One researcher pointed out: “I have a very personal issue with selling out. I think you also run the risk of self-aggrandizement, that you are important and start selling yourself as a brand image” [P4]. The underlying critique is grounded on rejecting the rampant marketization of academia and the attached neoliberal ethos. By criticizing this behavior, academics positioned themselves as against the marketing of their scholarship despite actively engaging in these platforms. This appeared to be a prominent argument put forth by participants from the Humanities and the Social Sciences.

While digital self-promotional activities are rife with potential pitfalls, women especially find themselves at a unique crossroads. Dobele and Wastell (2019) highlight how women, in the face of potential backlash, display hesitancy to engage in self-promotion, subsequently affecting their capacity to pursue goals effectively. This echoes with a sentiment shared by some female respondents who revealed a palpable sense that women tread a thin line between being perceived as professionally proactive and being disparagingly labeled as ‘showy’. A female respondent summarized this tension with the statement: “in Chilean academia, it is still very taboo to be showy” [P16]. Recalling that academia is a prestige economy that has been coded as male-dominated, these apprehensions by female academics are not surprising (Kandiko, Coate & de St. Croix 2018). However, most women academics acknowledged engaging in self-promotion via these platforms, which might be counterintuitive.

Overall, the phenomenon of academic self-promotion on ASNS emerges as a contested terrain among the participants, especially seen against the backdrop of more traditional self-promotional actions such as conference presentations that allow for direct feedback and engagement, fostering a sense of community and collaborative discourse. This contrasts with the more solitary nature of digital self-promotion, where engagement can feel more transactional and metrics driven.

Although this dual discourse in academia concerning self-promotion is not necessarily mutually exclusive, it -again- reflects the current state of the ever-evolving academic landscape, where different conflicting ethos and the material conditions of HE mingle to reshape what it means to be an academic in Chile. The digital age, characterized by ubiquitous online platforms, amplifies this tension.

CONCLUSION

In a rapidly evolving academic landscape, the influx of digital platforms is introducing nuanced tensions within the scholarly realm, as evidenced through the lens of Chilean academics. Platforms such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate, present a double-edged sword: while these platforms democratize knowledge dissemination and amplify voices from the periphery, they simultaneously introduce an intensified performance pressure, marrying the age-old mandate of ‘Publish or Perish’ with a new-age imperative: ‘Promote or Perish’.

The study’s dive into the experiences of Chilean academics unveils an intricate portrait of academic reputation-building in today’s digital age. Quantitative metrics and rankings on these digital platforms indicate a burgeoning gamification of academic reputation. Indeed, such metrics can offer validation, especially to demographics like early-career and female researchers. But there is an inherent risk of equating digital visibility with genuine academic

impact. This blurring of lines between online metrics and true scholarly contribution emphasizes the need for a deeper, more qualitative appreciation of knowledge production and impact.

Another finding from this research is the strategic efforts by scholars to enhance their digital visibility. Such pragmatic choices, though boosting online presence, could inadvertently divert genuine research endeavors. Coupled with this is an inherent anxiety related to public perceptions and skepticism regarding data accuracy on these platforms.

Central to this discourse is the role of quantification in assessing scholarly work. Traditional metrics, deeply ingrained in Chile's academic evaluation systems, were widely critiqued by the participants for their reductionist tendencies. The emergence of altmetrics, though seen as a modern and up-to-date evaluation tool, bring their own set of complexities, revealing the necessity for a balanced evaluation system.

Beyond the metrics, the sociocultural dynamics of Chile, marked by a history of HE privatization and massification pose unique challenges shown, for instance, in the friction between the more traditional academic ethos and the individualistic demand of digital self-promotion. Despite the transformational potential of digital platforms, traditional indicators of prestige—peer recognition, community impact, and institutional progression—retain their predominance. However, the emphasis on global rankings, internationalization of HE institutions and their staff, fueled by the global circuit of AC, might further accentuate the significance of these digital metrics for Chilean scholars.

The findings here must be seen in the light of certain limitations. The qualitative and exploratory nature of this study may not be representative of the whole academic community in Chile neither of Latin America. Also, a more finely-tuned analysis considering the interplay of variables such as disciplinary, institutional, and contractual variances is definitely due.

The implication of this study beckons a deeper introspection into the use of digital platforms that value substance alongside visibility. It is crucial for Chile's academic institutions to recognize these evolving digital pressures and craft environments that value quality research in a holistic manner. Additionally, policy recommendations might lean towards equipping academics with tools to manage their digital identities ethically and efficiently.

In sum, the study uncovers the multifaceted tensions arising from academics' use of ASNS in Chile, illuminating the broader issues of the interplay of AC and the digitalization of academic work. Also, the findings underscore the need for a re-evaluation of research assessment, striving for a broader understanding of scholarly contributions, which includes digital scholarship. As Chilean academia steers deeper into the digital age, embracing its promise of open access while remaining aware of its pitfalls will be academia's balancing act in future years. Comparing these findings with global trends, one might find both overlap and divergence, underscoring the importance of localized studies in understanding the global digital academic phenomenon.

ADDITIONAL FILES

The additional files for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendix 1.** Semi-structured Interview Guide. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.856.s1>
- **Appendix 2.** Interview analysis matrix (inductive). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.856.s2>

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