

[This is the postprint (accepted and copyedited version) of the article, which will be published in Information Research. Since the final publication details are not yet available, please cite this version as follows: Siso-Calvo, B., Arquero-Avilés, R., Marco-Cuenca, G. & Faggiolani, Ch. (2024). Academic social networks and self-branding among Library and Information Science academics in the European Union, Information Research (in press). Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10760/46245>]

Academic social networks and self-branding among library and information science academics in the European Union

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Abstract

Introduction. *This research analyses the perception and habits about digital platforms and self-branding among European scholars in the library and information science area.*

Method. *A survey using a questionnaire was administered online to 1,562 scholars working in public universities in the European Union. A response of 201 respondents was obtained.*

Analysis. *The collected data by Google Forms were processed using a specific spreadsheet in Excel and analysed using the software SPSS Statistics. Independent-samples *t* (two-tailed) and Chi-squared tests were used to check for significant differences between variables.*

Results. *Most participants think that digital platforms are useful for increasing the visibility of their work and managing their reputation, particularly ResearchGate and Google Scholar, although there is limited information in their profiles about their academic activity. The responses show a positive attitude towards personal branding, but most do not adopt it mainly due to not having enough time. Scholars who use personal branding are more committed to the use of personal websites and disseminating their academic achievements.*

Conclusions. *These findings support the need for more in-depth investigations related to the strategies of academics engaging in personal branding, as well as measuring the impact it has on their academic and professional careers.*

Introduction

The current transformation being seen in academic communication is the result of the emergence of the so-called Open Science movement (European Commission, 2020), as well as the increase in various types of digital platforms (websites, repositories, social media, etc.) that allow research activity and academic achievements to be disseminated and made visible. The possibilities of the digital media, added to an increasingly competitive academic environment, encourage scholars to use and adopt digital tools in their workflows to obtain greater prestige and professional recognition.

Academic reputation must be understood as the general judgement of a scholar's prestige, based on their work, impact and academic achievements over time, in accordance with the opinion of experts in their field of study (Dewett and Denisi, 2004; Herman, 2018). Reputation is a differentiating element and, therefore, a source of competitive advantage insofar as it constitutes an indicator of quality.

The pursuit of a good reputation is not unique to the digital age, but it has changed how it can and should be managed. In accordance with Jamali et al. (2016), this was traditionally limited to a single academic activity (research), a product of that activity (publications) and a measure of that production (citations), but the new scenario offers different ways of managing

a reputation (Nicholas et al., 2015), with channels that not only allow scientific production to be disseminated, but also give visibility to the scholars themselves and their activity as a whole. For Kjellberg and Haider (2019), academic communication also consists of making oneself visible as a researcher.

The idea of putting the focus on the scholars themselves through their professional activity can be linked to the strategic area of marketing known as personal branding or self-branding. In this context and based on other approaches to the concept (Scheidt et al., 2020; Duffy and Pooley, 2017), self-branding can be defined as the conscious process for the development and management of a personal brand, paying special attention to online presence and the use of digital platforms to make relevant content such as personal qualities and professional performance available in a competitive environment.

Reputation is the outcome of that branding process and needs a planned method that allows it to be managed effectively. The knowledge and use of emerging platforms acquire a fundamental role in the adoption of self-branding in the academic context (Siso-Calvo and Arquero-Avilés, 2020).

There are numerous types of digital platform on the market that can be used for branding purposes due to the features they offer. Examples include academic social networks such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu and Google Scholar, permanent identifiers such as ORCID, general social networks like Facebook and Twitter (now “X”), as well as content managers for the creation of personal websites or blogs, such as Wordpress.

Several authors (Siso-Calvo and Arquero-Avilés, 2020; Meishar-Tal and Pieterse, 2017; Jordan, 2014) agree that the main functions of these digital platforms enable the construction of the digital identity, the management of personal and academic information, the dissemination and promotion of scientific production, as well as impact measurement and the monitoring of social influence through altmetrics. Indeed, different terms have been proposed to denominate these platforms, such as ‘*channel for scientific marketing*’ (Nentwich, 2010, p. 73), ‘*reputational platforms*’ (Jamali et al., 2016, p. 38) or ‘*technologies of the self*’, frequently used as tools for self-writing, self-presentation and self-control (Francke, 2019, p. 4).

Francke and Hammarfelt (2022) consider that academic social networking sites have come to fulfil a need in the academic publishing ecosystem. Scholars take advantage of the possibilities of these tools to share publications and expertise with others (Radford et al., 2020; Nicholas et al., 2020a; Baro et al., 2018), to increase citations (Muscanell and Uzt, 2017), to increase one’s visibility and the self-promotion (Radford et al., 2020; Nijjer and Raj, 2020; Jordan and Weller, 2018; Al-Daihani et al., 2018; Meishar-Tal and Pieterse, 2017) and, in general, for career progression (Donelan, 2016).

Related work

Digital platforms for academic branding and reputation

There is a significant number of studies related to various aspects of the platforms in academic activity. Kjellberg et al. (2016) reviewed the literature published in the 2004-2014 period and concluded that it is complex to systematise the existing knowledge and compare results because the subject is researched from different perspectives and using different methods.

The review by Hailu and Wu (2021) highlights a significant increase of publications on the use of academic social networks in academic communication between 2015 and 2018, but

only a few place the research in a specific context, and a minority of the works are from the perspective of academic branding and reputation.

Sugimoto et al. (2017) described the state of the art in the use of social networks and confirmed that they can be used for professional branding. In this regard, some authors analysed the benefits and opportunities provided by the use of the reputational platforms. Herman (2018) addressed the concept of academic reputation and identified the opportunities that scholars must build to maintain and demonstrate their reputation in today's environment. Camilleri (2017) stated that the academic branding and marketing of content of researchers' publications can lead to an improvement in their academic prestige and to an improvement in their reputation. Herman and Nicholas (2019) identified the range of traditional and new activities, both online and offline, that make up academic activity, as well as the means available to a scholar to take advantage of the reputational opportunities offered by an increasingly more open environment. The authors confirmed that the online dissemination of the results of scientific research plays a key role in building reputation and that the dissemination practices are being carried out for this purpose.

Another group of papers focuses on the study of specific social networks. D'Alessandro et al. (2020) consider that maintaining a correct profile on Google Scholar and publishing updates, preferably on ResearchGate, Academia.edu or Mendeley, are useful actions for maximising the advantages of these tools. Duffy and Pooley (2017) analysed the self-branding possibilities of Academia.edu and concluded that the main advantage for authors is visibility for increasing citations, which is crucial for career progression and consolidating prestige in their field.

Lastly, other research focuses on the opinion and use from the perspective of academics themselves. A research based on focus groups (Kjellberg and Haider, 2019) found that the use of social networks and digital profiles, together with publications and traditional merits, contribute to a researcher's image and, consequently, to the link to the trust and reputation that establish traditional rewards, such as career and funding opportunities.

A survey of 118 early career researchers from different countries (Nicholas et al., 2018) showed that digital platforms are gaining popularity, especially ResearchGate. Increasing the visibility and maximising the impact of research are considered its main reputational benefits. The results of an opinion survey of 251 European scholars on the emerging academic market (Jamali et al., 2016) found that publication in journals is the activity that most contributes to academic reputation, that ResearchGate is the most popular and most used platform and that the digital reputation systems will become increasingly important, especially for younger researchers.

A few studies of academic web profiles or scholars web presence have investigated what characterizes the profiles, especially from a qualitative perspective. Francke (2019) conducted a qualitative content analysis to explore how researchers actively promote their output and identified nine types in which the profile of an *academic self* may be rated according to qualitative forms of information about the academic life.

Use of digital platforms by library and information science professionals

Much of the scholarly output referred to is produced by authors in the library and information science field. However, while several studies have examined the behaviour of academics in other disciplines, this group remains relatively unexplored. Some recent investigations address various issues related to digital platforms by library professionals, but none of them from a reputational and author's point of view.

The study conducted by Baro et al. (2018) through an online survey of 455 scholars from 52 African universities, showed that the increased visibility of works and the promotion of academic research are very important factors that motivate scholars to upload their scientific production to the platforms. Stephen and Pramanathan (2020) researched the use and utility of academic social networks through a survey of 205 LIS professionals in the North Eastern Region in India. Among the results, it is worth highlighting that Google Scholar is the most used resource, searching for articles or tracking citations are the main purposes for using academic social networks, and that increasing citations or marketing is the main reason why the respondents uploaded their publications.

Siso-Calvo and Arquero-Avilés (2020) analysed the preferences of 255 Spanish scholars from the area based on the systematic exploration of their profiles on a set of platforms. Google Scholar and ResearchGate were the most popular and preferred services for making their scientific production more visible and accessible.

Lohia and Prakash (2023) examined the Google Scholar profile of library and information science faculty members employed in central universities of North India to determine their research online visibility and found that most of the faculty have a Google Scholar profile, making the authors' work more accessible. However, the analysis of the Google Scholar profiles of Pakistani scholars (Ali and Richardson, 2019) found that they are not taking full advantage of the opportunity this system offers to increase research visibility. In this regard, Radford et al. (2018) found, through thirty semi-structured interviews, that the platforms offer ways for scholars to connect with other scholars and disseminate their research, but strategies must be adopted to create/maintain an ethical and sustainable online presence.

A survey aimed at informetrics researchers (Liu et al., 2020) revealed that an ever-greater number of researchers use social networks for different types of academic activities and scholars studying altmetrics show more positive attitudes towards them.

This study helps fill a gap in the extant literature about digital platforms and self-branding specific to scholars in the information science area from the academic reputation perspective.

Objectives

The general objective of the research is to analyse the perception and habits about the use of digital platforms and self-branding from an academic reputational perspective among European scholars in the area of library and information science.

The following are formulated as specific objectives:

- Learn their opinion about the potential benefits of digital platforms.
- Estimate their opinion of personal branding for the academic career.
- Identify the most used digital platforms.
- Determine what type of information they disseminate about their professional activity.
- Detect the use of personal branding and the reasons to favour or reject it.
- Analyse if there are significant differences in habits by academic status and by the scholars who adopt personal branding.

Methods

The following describes how the methodological process was developed to ensure the quality and transparency of the information on the design and conduct of the web-based survey, the quantitative method for data collection used in this research.

Population and sample

The population under study consists of a total of 1,562 scholars from the library and information science area working in public universities in the European Union. Given the lack of official and updated directories on staff in the area, the selection of the population was based on the identification of public universities running relevant programmes and the subsequent identification of the scholars through the institution's website, from where their contact details were obtained. We relied on three directories to guide our search and identification of universities (iSchools, n.d.; Wilson, 2013; IFLA and Schniederjürgen, 2007). The sample consists of 201 scholars, corresponding to the total number of responses received. It is a non-probabilistic sample, specifically, voluntary and self-selective.

Design and development

The theoretical background of the survey is grounded in several key concepts related to digital platforms, self-branding and academic reputation within the scholarly context, as well as relevant theories and principles. Since the aim is to fill a specific gap about the topic, the questionnaire was meticulously designed to align with specific research objectives, which were formulated with a thorough consideration of the current state of the field and the theoretical background. For this reason, we created a new tool adapted to the characteristics of the research. Specifically, the questionnaire was created using the Google Forms service and was divided into sections: the introduction and informed consent with the objectives, structure and instructions about the questionnaire, as well as a clause on the anonymisation and processing of personal data; geographical and employment context; perceptions and ratings of scholars (according to the scale strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree); practices and habits of scholars; comments and suggestions as final open question to add comments on any of the issues raised in the survey.

Regarding the characteristics of the questions, all were marked as a mandatory response. They were formulated in a closed-ended format, including different types of questions depending on the information to be collected for the research: dichotomous, Likert scale, multiple choice and matrix ones. Additionally, two questions included a field where the participants could optionally and openly explain or expand their previous answers.

Given the difficulty involved in asking about something new or emerging, some questions included definitions to ensure the comprehension and reliability of the answers.

The questionnaire was designed within the framework of a broader research project with several objectives. The survey including the questions analysed in this paper is available on Zenodo (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7965726>).

Survey administration

An initial invitation and two reminders after a few weeks were sent by e-mail to the population during the first quarter of 2019. The e-mail included a concise presentation of the authors, the objectives of the research, the deadline as well as the link to participate in the survey. No incentives could be offered to try to increase the participation rate.

Data processing and results

The collected data by Google Forms were processed using a specific spreadsheet in Excel and analysed using the software SPSS Statistics.

The survey was limited to a single response to prevent multiple entries from the same individual. The tool uses a registration system to avoid duplication, but the data were not collected, guaranteeing the anonymity of the participants.

The responses received indicate a 13% participation rate. Of the 201 responses received, 193 were analysed and 8 were eliminated because the academic status did not fit the requirements of the study.

It was mandatory to answer all the questions to submit the survey, so all the analysed questionnaires were complete.

Although the questionnaire was designed within the framework of a broader research project with additional objectives, the results of this work refer only to the stated objectives related to digital platforms and personal branding.

Independent-samples t (two-tailed) and Chi-squared tests were used to check for significant differences regarding status and adoption of self-branding.

Note that in the following analyses, all status comparisons are between the group professor and senior lecturer against all the rest.

For question with Likert options (strongly disagree to strongly agree) the mean value was also calculated using numeric values of the options (1 being 'strongly disagree' and 4 being 'strongly agree').

Ethical issues and informed consent

The first page of the survey contained the essential information related to the voluntary participation of the respondents: objectives of the research, instructions and response time to complete the questionnaire, as well as a clause on the guarantee of anonymity of participants. Personal data that could identify participants were not collected in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016.

Acceptance of informed consent implied a voluntary decision to participate in the research.

Results

Geographical and employment context

The survey included two questions related to the geographical and employment context of the participants; specifically, they were asked about the country in which their university is located, as well as their current professional status.

The data from the first question show a broad geographical distribution (Table 1), with most of the participating scholars coming from Spain, the United Kingdom, Poland and Germany. On the other hand, there was no participation from Scholars in Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Latvia and the Netherlands.

It is worth mentioning that the greater participation of scholars from the aforementioned countries coincides with that fact that these countries have the most scholars assigned to the area being studied.

Country of university	%	N
Spain	27	55
United Kingdom	11	21
Poland	10	21
Germany	10	20
Bulgaria	6	12
Sweden	6	12
Italy	5	10
Greece	5	9
Others	20	41
Total	100	201

Table 1: Geographical distribution of the participants

In terms of their professional status, 22% of the participants belong to the group of professors, 32% are senior lecturers and 13% are lecturers (Table 2). These first three professional categories, those with the greatest job stability, represent 67% of respondents compared to the 33% accounted for by the rest.

Professional status (UK / US System)	%	N
Professor / Full Professor	22	44
Senior Lecturer / Associate Professor	32	64
Lecturer (permanent position)	13	27
Lecturer (fixed-term contract) / Assistant Professor	9	19
Associate Lecturer / Adjunct Professor	6	13
Research Associate	5	9
Postdoctoral Research Fellow	3	6
Predocctoral Research Fellow	6	11
Other	4	8
Total	100	201

Table 2: Professional status of the participants

Perception of digital platforms and personal branding

Opinion about the potential benefits of digital platforms

The assessment of the possibilities and benefits of digital platforms for personal academic marketing is the objective of the following series of statements. The respondents were asked to respond to each of them according to the following scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree.

Although the ratings were positive for the four proposed items, the issues related to the promotion of scientific production and the increase in citation obtained the highest level of agreement. 96% of participants agree that digital platforms are useful for promoting their scientific production (44% strongly agree and 52% agree) and 92% of scholars believe that the platforms have the potential to increase the possibility of the citing of scientific production (41% strongly agree and 51% agree). Moreover, 87% agree that they contribute to improving their academic reputation (36% strongly agree and 51% agree), as opposed to 13% who disagree with this statement. Finally, 81% of respondents consider that the presence on the network promotes the creation of new collaborations (29% strongly agree and 52% agree), although 19% disagree to some degree with this statement (Figure 1). There were no significant status differences in the opinion ratings about possibilities of digital platforms.

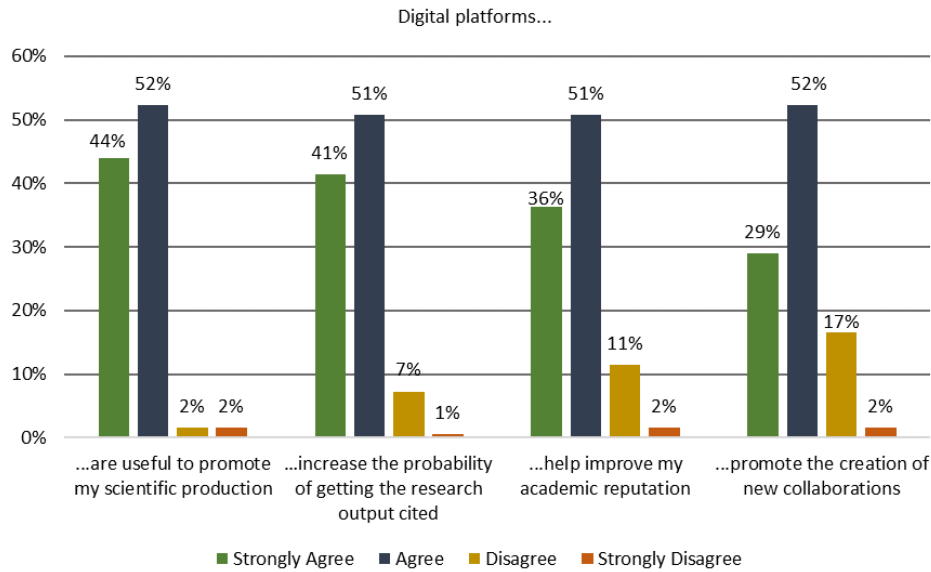


Figure 1: Opinion of digital platforms for personal academic marketing purposes

Opinion about personal branding for the academic career

A specific question about personal branding helps to understand the perception of respondents regarding their options for managing their reputation. So, they were asked if they consider personal branding to be an essential aspect for developing and promoting their career. The results show that the vast majority (80%) perceive it as beneficial for progressing in their academic career and 20% said no.

There were no significant status differences in the answers between professors and senior lecturers against all the rest. However, there were differences in the rating of the four statements about digital platforms according to the opinion on personal branding (Table 3). Those who are favourably disposed towards personal branding for academic career development agree more about the benefits of digital platforms.

Digital platforms...	Favour			Reject		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
... are useful to promote my scientific production	155	3.50	0.50	38	2.94	0.76
... increase the probability of getting the research output cited	155	3.47	0.56	38	2.76	0.58
... help improve my academic reputation	155	3.34	0.61	38	2.68	0.77
... promote the creation of new collaborations	155	3.22	0.66	38	2.57	0.72

All items significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 3: Differences with regard the opinion of self-branding for digital platforms

Habits about the use of digital platforms and personal branding

Use of digital platforms for reputational purposes

As different conditions may mean that academics do not actually use the platform (such as simply having a profile without activity or relevant information) the results shown in Figure 2 provide insight into the preferences of the scholars regarding the knowledge and use of a set of digital platforms for academic reputation purposes. Participants had to indicate which of the proposed cases best describe their practices:

- I use and update the platform: platforms more popular and updated were Google Scholar (66%), the institutional personal website (53%), ORCID (50%) and ResearchGate (49%).
- I use the platform, but it is not up to date: tools that, although they are being used, are not completely updated. LinkedIn and their institutional personal website (28% in both), ResearchGate (27%) and Academia.edu (22%) stand out.
- I am registered on the platform but I do not use it: scholars create a profile on some platforms but do not use it, leaving the profile without activity or relevant information. The main networks involved in this situation are Academia.edu (29%), Mendeley (26%), Facebook (22%) and LinkedIn (20%).
- I am aware of the platform, but I am not registered on it: many scholars are aware of digital technologies, but they do not have a profile and, therefore, they are not users of them. The most noteworthy cases are Altmetric.com (59%), a personal website (52%), Twitter (X) (45%), Facebook (43%) and Mendeley (35%).
- I am not aware of the platform: a small percentage of participants are not aware of any of the reference platforms, specifically, Impactstory (50%), Altmetric.com (32%) and Mendeley (11%).

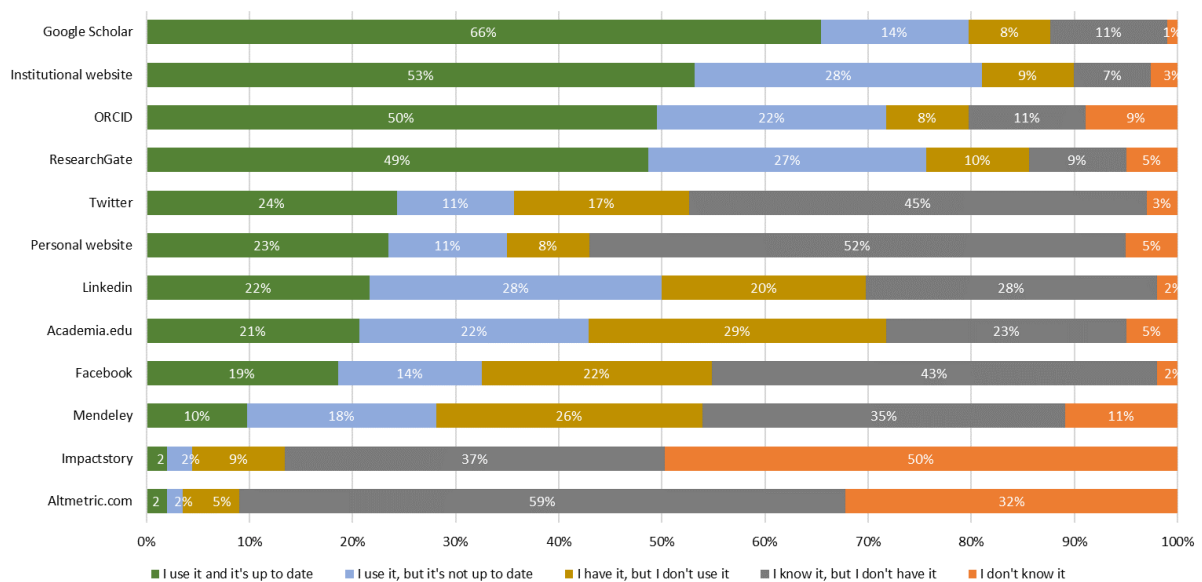


Figure 2: Knowledge and use of digital platforms for academic reputation purposes

In relation to the effective use of platforms (those who affirm that they use them), most of the participants (98%) use at least one of the twelve proposed platforms. Scholars use an average of five platforms and only a small group (8%) uses most of them (at least eight). There were no significant differences in the mean number of platforms by status (professors and senior lecturers as against all the rest) or by the opinion concerning personal branding.

Since Google Scholar, personal institutional website, ORCID and ResearchGate were the scholarly services that obtained most use, they were chosen to explore possible differences in responses by status and self-branding perception. There were no status differences. With regard to self-branding perception, there were no real differences in the case of Google Scholar, personal institutional website and ORCID. However, contingency tables and Chi-squared tests show significant differences in the case of the academic social network ResearchGate ($X^2= 4.0067$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, scholars with a favourable opinion on personal branding use ResearchGate to a greater extent (78,7%) than those with an unfavourable opinion (63,2%).

Dissemination of academic activity

In the following question, given that personal branding requires to a large extent that the professional activity information is available, we wanted to determine what content or information about their academic and professional activity the respondents are disseminating through the set of platforms (Figure 3). The data on this question show that the most common type of information is the basic and essential one, such as their current professional status (92%), their areas of research (92%), contact information (92%) and the metadata or bibliographic references for their scientific production (81%). However, another type of relevant information that contributes to reputation building is disseminated to a lesser extent, since the 67% of participants provide the full text of their publications and less than 50% publish details of their current research projects (44%) or their participation in scientific committees (28%). Lastly, the outputs about completed or current research projects (11% and 7% respectively), as well as participation in upcoming events and conferences (7%) is scarce. Scholars disseminate an average of seven types of information and only a small group (4,7%) disseminate most of them (at least ten). None of the academics publishes the sixteen types of information proposed, the maximum being fourteen by 1% of the respondents.

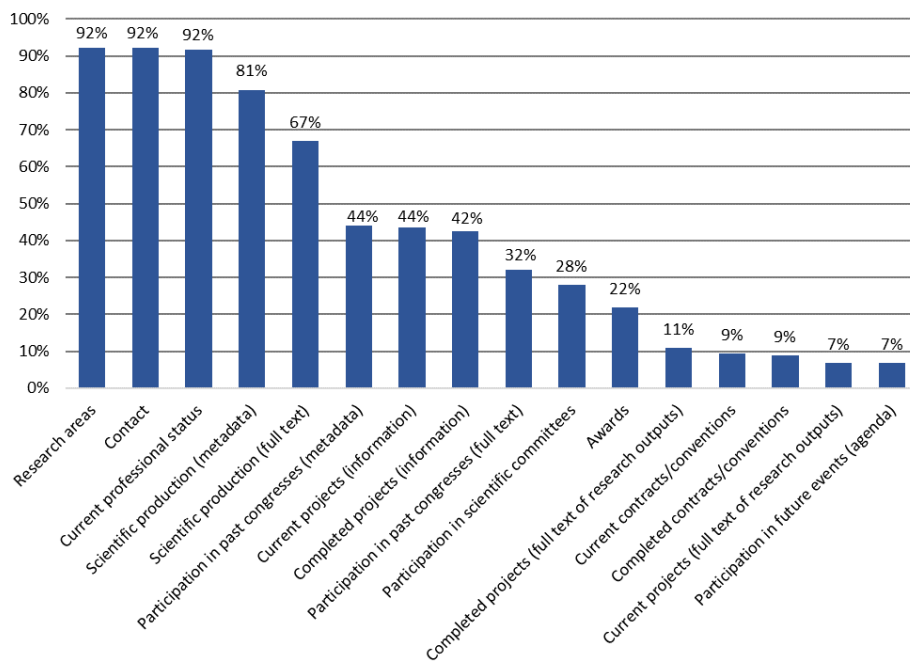


Figure 3: Academic activity disseminated through the digital platforms

There were status differences in regard to four types of information that academics disseminate (Figure 4). The group of professors and senior lecturers disseminates information about their research areas ($X^2= 5.662$, $p = 0.017$), details of completed projects ($X^2= 4.354$, $p = 0.037$), contributions to congresses ($X^2= 5.146$, $p = 0.023$) and participation in future events ($X^2= 4.645$, $p < 0.031$) more than their rest of colleagues do.

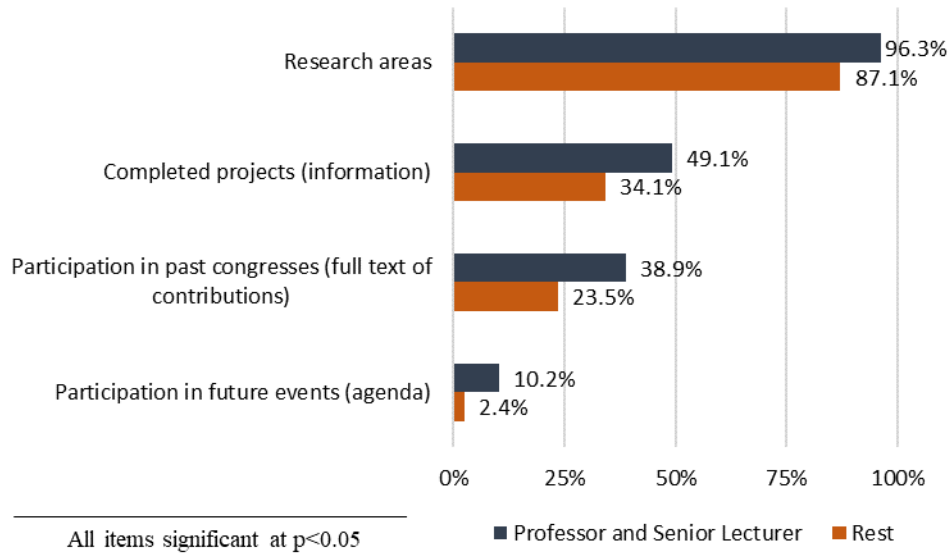


Figure 4: Status differences for the dissemination of academic activity

Engage in personal branding

The last question is essential to determine the reality of the participants in terms of the development and conscious execution of strategies. They were asked about the use of personal branding as a management strategy for their digital identity and academic reputation. Results show that only 31% use personal branding. Furthermore, 13% of 69% that don't use personal branding are not even aware of the term.

There were no status differences in response to this question. However, there were significant differences in the number of academics engaging in personal branding with regard to their opinion about its possibilities in academia ($X^2 = 11.462$, $p < 0.01$). Scholars with a favourable opinion use more self-branding (36.1%) as compared to their colleagues (7.9%).

At this stage it is relevant to observe the behaviour of the group of academics who use personal branding in order to detect possible differences in opinion and habits as compared to their colleagues.

Regarding the opinion about the potential benefits of digital platforms, there were differences in the rating of the four statements (Table 4). Academics engaging in personal branding agree more about the benefits of digital platforms.

Digital platforms...	Yes			No		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
... are useful to promote my scientific production	59	3.66	0.47	134	3.28	0.62
... increase the probability of getting the research output cited	59	3.56	0.53	134	3.23	0.64
... help improve my academic reputation	59	3.44	0.65	134	3.11	0.70
... promote the creation of new collaborations	59	3.27	0.73	134	3.02	0.69

All items significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 4: Differences in the rating of digital platforms benefits by scholars engaging in self-branding

There were also differences in the use of platforms by those who said yes to this question. This is the case of the personal web ($X^2 = 7.816$, $p < 0.01$) and Twitter ($X^2 = 8.431$, $p < 0.01$). More academics engaging in personal branding have a personal website (49.2%) and use

Twitter (50.8%) as compared to those not engaging in personal branding (28.4% and 29.1% respectively).

The number of platforms used by self-branding users is also different. While respondents use on average five platforms, the mean for this group of scholars is six.

Another difference concerns the dissemination of information about their academic activity. There are three types of information that academics using personal branding disseminate in contrast to their colleagues (Figure 5): the contributions of the congresses ($X^2= 5,559$, $p = 0.018$), the participation in scientific committees ($X^2= 8.737$, $p = 0.003$) and the awards ($X^2= 7.352$, $p < 0.007$).

In addition, there were differences in the number of types of information disseminated by this group about their activity, with an average of 8 as opposed to the 6 disseminated by the rest of scholars.

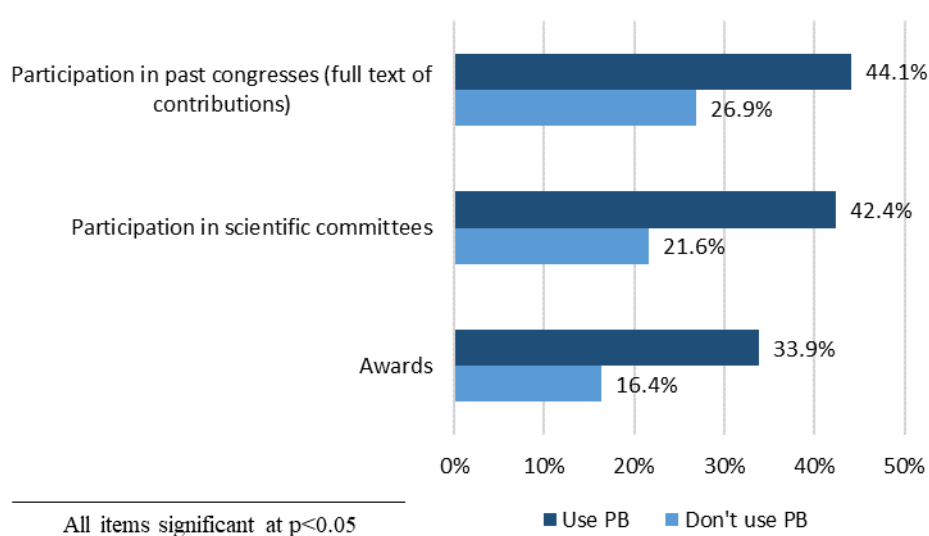


Figure 5: Differences in dissemination of academic information by self-branding use

Reasons to favour or reject the use of personal branding

Participants had an open-ended question where they could optionally state why they did or did not use personal branding. The main reasons given by those engaging in personal branding, furnished by eleven people, were that this type of management is fundamental in the digital age (55%), to get established in their field or to retain professional standing (27%) and to make the research activity widely accessible and visible worldwide (18%).

The responses explaining why these scholars do not use this strategy, furnished by twenty-eight people, concern the lack of time to both design and detail a plan to carry it out (46.4%). Other reasons show that certain scholars do not feel the need to integrate this activity into their professional routine (31.1%) and believe that reputation should be based solely on publications derived from research (17.9%). Some scholars expressed a lack of training (14.3%) or a certain rejection and negative sentiment toward the term personal branding (10.7%), caused by its relationship with marketing and its associated negative connotation. The last reasons were that scholars didn't think about it (7.1%) and the lack of professional motivation (7.1%). The number of reasons is greater than the total number of responses (28), as some participants mentioned more than one reason.

The participants also had a final open question to add comments on any of the issues raised in the survey. Sixteen comments were received but only two concerning the content of the survey, specifically regarding the reasons related to the lack of professional motivation and training. These comments reveal the little or no institutional support perceived, as well as the lack of recognition of these practices by many forums.

Discussion

In accordance with the theoretical premises and previous results outlined in the literature review, this study found that LIS scholars also display a positive attitude towards the benefits of digital platforms for the academic activity. Most of the participants perceive that digital platforms are mainly useful for promoting and increasing the citations of their scientific production (92%), helping improve their academic reputation (87%).

The views of scholars towards personal branding strategies for the academic career are also positive, as the majority (80%) consider it as beneficial for their professional development. Unsurprisingly, scholars who are favourably disposed towards personal branding agree more about the benefits of digital platforms.

In this regard, some platforms are being used for reputational purposes. As concluded in previous studies for the library and information science group (Siso-Calvo and Arquero-Avilés, 2020; Stephen and Pramanathan, 2020; Liu et al., 2020), Google Scholar (80%), ResearchGate (76%) and ORCID (72%) are the most used, even though in some cases they are not completely updated. In the case of ResearchGate, scholars with a favourable opinion on personal branding use it to a greater extent than those with an unfavourable opinion. Other popular platforms, such as Twitter (X), LinkedIn, Academia.edu and Facebook are also used but to a lesser extent.

These statements constitute a widely held opinion given that there are no significant status differences.

The popularity of Google Scholar and, mainly, ResearchGate has also been confirmed in other disciplines (Mason, 2020; Nicholas et al., 2020a; Shehata, 2019; Bhardwaj, 2017), and their characteristics and features are the subject of numerous works (e.g., Hailu and Wu, 2021). Metrics, both traditional and alternative, generated by these platforms receive special attention and several authors have analysed their possibilities as a measure of reputation. The past functionality RG Score, initially aimed at measuring the user's individual reputation and the assessment of universities (Wiecheteck and Pastuszek, 2022) was removed on August 2022 due to criticism as unreliable indicator (e.g., Copiello and Bonifaci, 2018). In general, it has been demonstrated that social media metrics can be problematic (Ortega, 2015) and manipulated (Liu et al., 2020; Ali and Richardson, 2019), causing distrust among some researchers, who consider that it should not be an indicator of reputation (Jamali et al., 2016). The results in fact indicated low use and knowledge of tools with social media-based metrics such as Altmetric (96%) or Impactstory (96%) among the respondents.

Studies in this regard show that even though metrics and indicators are increasingly important features on academic web profiles, qualitative forms of information about the academic life are also fundamental in the digital context (Francke, 2019). This fact allows reinforcing the idea of the conscious management of reputation through personal branding, based on the proper knowledge and use of digital platforms with the aim not only of increasing and demonstrating the impact of research, but also of disseminating relevant information on professional activity. This enables the scientific community to value the academic work and achievements as a whole. However, respondents still disseminate limited information about their academic life, something confirmed in other studies (e.g. Francke, 2019). In addition to their lines of research or references to their scientific production, to a lesser extent they

disseminate the full text of the publications (67%), and much less so other content such as research projects (44%), participation in events (44%) and awards received (22%). However, there are status differences in regard to four types of information. The group of professors and senior lecturers disseminates information about their research areas, details of completed projects, contributions to congresses and participation in future events more than their colleagues do.

Despite scholars being aware of and perceiving the benefits of personal branding, the majority (69%) do not apply it when managing their reputation and for some (13%) it is even an unknown term. Unsurprisingly, scholars with a favourable opinion use more self-branding as compared to their colleagues. Nevertheless, there are no status differences in the use of digital platforms and personal branding although past research has shown that young scholars are more engaged with social media and the online services that help build scholarly reputation should benefit young scholars (Jamali et al., 2016).

This study found that scholars engaging in personal branding have different habits on the issues explored. These scholars agree more about the benefits of digital platforms and, even if the preferred platforms continue to be Google Scholar, ORCID and ResearchGate, they use more Twitter and the personal website as compared to the rest. According to Francke (2019), most content on the academic web profiles is algorithmically produced and the researcher's self-writing is often more extensive on personal or institutional Web pages.

These scholars are aware of the need to disseminate all kinds of information about their activity to the reputation building and use more platforms for it. In addition to basic information, it is possible to find relevant content about their participation in events, in scientific committees and the awards obtained.

Finally, this study shows the main reasons for using personal branding, that were ranked consecutively as: it is fundamental in the digital age, to retain professional standing and it helps to make the research activity widely visible and accessible. It is perhaps surprising that the answers are rather generic and do not point to concrete benefits.

On the other hand, the lack of time to design or carry it out a strategy is the main reason given by those who do not adopt personal branding, something also mentioned by those who do not use academic social networks (Radford et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Al-Daihani et al., 2018; Nicholas et al., 2017, 2015; Donelan, 2016). Other reasons show that some scholars do not feel the need to integrate this practice into their professional routine, or that they lack the necessary training. The lack of professional motivation and the belief that reputation should be based on publications are two popular reasons that can be a problem when it comes to personal branding. This could be explained by the traditional assessment and reputation system based on publications in high-impact factor journals, which, in turn, results in the theoretically positive attitude toward social media not being translated into practice (Nicholas et al. 2020b).

Limitations

The sample is not necessarily representative of the population. It is a non-probabilistic sample, specifically, voluntary and self-selective. The decision to participate in the study may be motivated by several reasons inherent to the development of the research: for example, the degree of interest or knowledge of the topic. That means that the results obtained from the sample cannot be generalised to the population. Nevertheless, this study is explorative and contains much of interest for the progress of knowledge.

Conclusions

This study reported on the findings of a questionnaire survey of 193 library and information science European scholars in respect to their views and practices on reputational platforms and personal branding.

The majority of European scholars in this area recognise the potential benefits of digital platforms and acknowledge that these platforms can enhance the visibility and dissemination of their work, ultimately contributing to their academic reputation.

The study reveals a range of digital platforms used, including ResearchGate, Google Scholar and ORCID. However, the study found that scholars tend to disseminate limited information about their academic life on digital platforms. While basic information such as academic status and research areas are commonly shared, there is variation in the extent to which scholars disseminate details about their ongoing research projects, full-text publications or committee involvements.

This suggests a need for scholars to broaden the scope of information they share to effectively build their academic reputation. Despite the new possibilities offered by digital media for managing digital identity and reputation, there is still a predominant preference for reputation derived from scientific output, driven by the current academic assessment and promotion system based on the Impact Factor and prestige of the publishing medium.

Personal branding is perceived as valuable for academic career advancement as actively managing their online presence and cultivating a strong personal brand can help participants stand out and gain recognition within the library and information science community. However, while few scholars actively engage in personal branding, others do not prioritise or may even reject the concept.

Scholars who actively engage in personal branding demonstrate different habits compared to their colleagues. They agree more about the benefits of digital platforms and utilise platforms like Twitter and personal websites to a greater extent. Content on academic web profiles generated by these scholars tends to be more extensive and researcher-written compared to algorithmically produced content found on other platforms. These scholars may benefit from expanding the scope of information they share to enhance their visibility and impact.

Reasons for adopting personal branding include career advancement and establishing professional credibility. Barriers to adoption include lack of time, concerns about self-promotion and limited institutional support.

Further institutional support is needed in terms of the training offered by universities. They should promote the adoption of these practices since a good reputation for their faculty has a positive impact on the reputation of the institution.

The study contributes to the field by exploring whether there are unique aspects within the discipline that influence online self-branding and offering insights that can be valuable not only for academics but also for academic institutions, policymakers and professionals in the information science domain.

Future research would focus on studying in depth the strategies of academics who use personal branding, as well as measuring the impact it has on their academic and professional careers.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the institutional support from the IDEA-Lab (UCM) research group and would like to express their gratitude to all the survey participants who contributed to the research.

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