

Nurse Author & Editor

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Using ResearchGate Responsibly

Using ResearchGate Responsibly: Another Resource for Building Your Profile as a Nurse Author

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Early career authors need to consider a range of profile building opportunities to establish and grow their international reputation. Globally, academics and researchers face a plethora of electronic platforms that they can subscribe to free of charge. However, as with everything online, participation in these platforms and the upkeep of these sites takes considerable time and effort to

maintain currency and impact. Given the constraints of daily working life, it is important to consider the benefits of engaging productively with these forums to ensure efficient time management. Strategic selection of platforms cannot only disseminate research and other career achievements, but also provide opportunities for peer recognition, networking, and future collaboration, all of which may potentially contribute to achieving career aspirations. Interestingly, some recent research suggests that communicating via these sites is becoming an accepted means of scholarly communication (Thelwall & Kousha, 2015). In this paper we present some factors that may warrant careful consideration when engaging with ResearchGate (RG) to disseminate research.

Given the wide reach and specialization of platforms, researchers need to consider seriously whether they can afford not to have an active presence on such sites (Thelwall & Kousha, 2015). Many institutions encourage staff to develop social media profiles that are linked to their workplace, and RG may be one of these. RG is a website that allows institutions and individuals to disseminate their work, connect with like-minded people across the globe, and create performance measures for both the individual researcher and institutions. For researchers, RG provides a means to profile their identity as an active researcher, promoting their research and expertise, and facilitating access to their publications. The site also enables networking with others, posting questions, and access to job vacancies. RG has global reach and impact; increasingly its metrics are being monitored by users and institutions (Thelwall & Kousha, 2015). The numbers of professionals subscribing to RG is cited to be more than 4.5 million, with over 10,000 subscribers using the site each day, the company itself has over 120 employees and has secured

over US\$35 million from investors (Van Noorden, 2014).

The importance of such platforms on academic success cannot be overlooked given that academic capital and social networking skills are increasingly measured for career researcher impact. For some, particularly early career researchers, (who tend to be younger) who are accustomed to engaging in social media as a regular part of their daily life, interacting with these sites is the norm. For others, learning to navigate the system can be challenging and their likelihood of engaging with social media may not be a priority. Irrespective of experience, it is important for subscribers of RG to be familiar with current practices to ensure academic integrity whilst being mindful that RG also leaves an electronic footprint.

Essentially, RG is an effective medium for the individual researcher to profile and disseminate their work internationally. RG goes beyond allowing researchers to list their publications but also provides a means for researchers to collate altmetrics reflecting the impact of a paper rather than using citations alone (Hoffman et al, 2015; Thelwall & Kousha, 2015). This includes the total number of papers published, H index, impact factors, downloads, views, and the RG score. Downloads are an indicator of the extent to which an article has been read. The number of views may provide an indication of interest in the work. The RG score measures scientific reputation and is calculated using an undisclosed algorithm (Yu, Wu, Alhalabi, Kao, & Wu, 2016). Institutions that use RG in turn may have a higher profile than those that do not, as a direct consequence of the individual contributions of members (Thelwall & Kousha, 2015).

Notwithstanding this, there are identifiable shortcomings with the RG score.

This score is provided in a weekly (a meaningless timeframe) email, displayed on the individual's profile and based on research outcomes shared on the platform, interactions, and peer reputation (such as questions, answers, followers, downloads) (Kraker & Lex, 2015). In an evaluation by Kraker and Lex (2015, p. 1), the score was reported as "intransparent and irreproducible," and "changes in the score" could not be "reconstructed." The absence of transparency and the inability to reconstruct the RG score (amongst other factors identified) seriously impedes the usefulness of the RG score as a valid metric and academics are cautioned against the formal use of this as an evaluation measure in its current form (Kraker & Lex, 2015).

Importantly, many publishers are also concerned about illegal activity concerning uploaded content to RG. In 2013, the publisher Elsevier provided:

3,000 notices to Academia.edu and other sites under the US Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), demanding that they take down papers for which the publisher owned copyright. Academia.edu passed each notice on to its users — a decision that triggered a public outcry. One researcher who received a take-down request did not want to be named, but told Nature: "I hardly know any scientists who don't violate copyright laws. We just fly below the radar and hope that the publishers don't notice." (Van Noorden, 2014, p. 128).

Whilst RG can promote work and increase dissemination, it is equally important to ensure this is conducted legally and copyright is not violated. Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers (STM), a global voice for scholarly publishing, is the premier association for academic publishers. In order to better understand issues pertaining to article sharing, STM recently

conducted consultation across the scholarly community (see <http://www.stm-assoc.org/stm-consultations/scn-consultation-2015/>). This consultative process enabled stakeholders to develop principles pertaining to how, where, and what content should be available via electronic networks and sites. These principles have been adopted by some, but not all publishers and stakeholders. For further updates readers are encouraged to view the following website: <http://www.stm-assoc.org/stm-consultations/scn-consultation-2015/>. To the best of our knowledge, and at the time of this writing, RG has not adopted the STM Scholarly Collaboration Network Policy.

Many publishers permit the final accepted version of a paper to be uploaded, but not the final accepted PDF version (Van Noorden, 2014). Publishing houses provide for a fee, open access, which does not generally impede copyright. As a general rule, posting an abstract is acceptable, provided a link to the original article is also supplied. RG often provides links to easily upload full papers so a degree of caution is advised when navigating RG as posting a full PDF paper (publisher produced) on RG may not necessarily comply with the signed copyright agreement. RG also recommends that researchers check their publishing conditions prior to posting a paper to ensure that copyright is not breached. In addition, RG allows and facilitates the sending of papers via of private messaging.

There may be a context for UK researchers which would seem to legitimize the uploading of their papers onto RG. The UK government requires that the results of publicly funded research needs to be made openly available, including publications (RCUK, 2016). This has been followed by the REF (Research Excellence Framework, the UK's assessment of higher education research performance) making a wider policy application of this open access

principle. The four UK higher education funding bodies have introduced an open-access requirement in the next REF (HEFCE, 2016). The next REF process requires only publications that are openly available, be allowed for consideration in the assessment. Tate (2015) presents some strategies for dealing with this requirement, including the uploading of papers onto publicly available, university run websites that fulfill the REF requirement for open access. These websites need to follow the same copyright requirements, but UK colleagues may believe that the requirement for open access is a principle that trumps copyright law, however, this is not the case.

Another issue experienced by users of RG is the constant stream of emails with continual updates which can be annoying and time consuming. It is also noted that RG is becoming more aggressive in its marketing strategies through email via the default settings although this is somewhat contingent on the activity within one's network (Kraker & Lex, 2015). Borrowing from other professional websites, like LinkedIn, endorsement of colleagues' skills and connections is another feature of RG. Despite the increasing popularity and utility of RG, researchers need to remain mindful of their actions when navigating RG.

To conclude, academic social websites, like RG, have their place, and seem to show that their use can enhance the research profile of participants. However, there are two caveats, firstly that some of the metrics that RG uses are currently not formally accepted as evidence of academic performance, and secondly that care needs to be taken not to infringe copyright laws when uploading published papers onto RG.

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