

Chapter 5

Scholarly Communication Practice and Strategies in Institutions of Higher Learning in Africa: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores scholarly communication practices and strategies in institutions of higher learning in Sub-Saharan Africa to increase visibility and reputation. For long, it has been acknowledged that foundations of institutions of higher learning rest upon creating and disseminating knowledge, which serves as an engine for scientific progression leading to a knowledge society. This is true despite scholarly communications receiving limited recognition from senior leadership at most institutions of learning. Visibility of institutions via scholarly communications is of high significance considering the inputs made by scholars and the applicability of study findings for perfecting routinized works or correcting faulty systems in departments, ministries, and agencies in nations. This is evident in developed countries who furnish their scholarly communication offices with librarians to enhance the production and communication of knowledge. Strategies and practices of scholarly communications among institutions of higher learning are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Scholarly communication in sub-Saharan Africa will remain latent or in a state where it is, unless ramped up by using technologies and freed from decades-old models of publishing (Malape, 2017). This is true as scholars on African continent account for 1% of the total global research output (World Bank, 2014). To buttress this point, sub-Saharan Africa produced only 11,142 scientific researches in 2008 where South Africa contributed 46.4%, followed by Nigeria (11.4%), and Kenya (6.6%) (UNESCO, 2010, p. 285), which make these countries the top three knowledge producers on the continent. Alternatively, according to Ezema and Onyanchan, (2016), in terms of the global representation of Registry of Open Access Repositories (ROAR), Africa contributed only 136 (3.4%) of the total 4055 repositories. There is discrepancy of repository with respect to 56 countries in Africa. That is, only four countries accounted for 60% of the total repositories in the entire continent. These countries are South Africa, Kenya, and Egypt and Nigeria contributing 47 (34.6%), 14 (10.3%), and 11 (8.1%) respectively. The implication of this low number of repositories implies poor visibility of universities in Africa. In addition, for regional distribution of African contribution to Directory of Open Access Repositories (DOAR), out of 132 repositories, Central Africa contributed 2 (1.52%), East Africa 35 (26.52%), North Africa 27 (20.45%), South Africa 45 (34.09), and West Africa 23 (17.42%). Among the 20 countries present in ROAR and DOAJ, South Africa has more repositories in ROAR and DOAR while Egypt has more than 70% of contributions to DOAJ. Furthermore, in DOAR, multidisciplinary has majority (66%) of the entire entries in the repositories, science has more entries than humanities and social sciences combined (Ezema & Onyanchan, 2016). By implication, positioning of Egypt as the most contributing country (70%) among the 20 participating countries in Africa to the Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJs) paves way for her to retain an apex in scholarly communication practice (Ezema & Onyanchan, 2016).

Besides, to curtail these inherently invisible statuses of the continent, research output compelled adoption of three approaches, namely; “*OA journals, donor-funded schemes, and negotiated access schemes*” (Malape, 2016, p. 7). Throughout these activities, scholars in institutions of higher learning are the engine behind knowledge production. The major concern of institutions of higher learning, where these scholars mostly operate, is the improvement of their efficiency and effectiveness that maximizes the relevance of the impact of funded research outputs (Neylon et al., 2014a). The effects of these impacts are beyond scholarly community consumption but encompass “*influence on policy, improvement in health and living standards, cultural enrichment or an improved environment*” (Neylon et al., 2014a, p. 1). The assessment and reward of these impacts are in conformity with the missions and visions of those institutions. From altmetrics analysis, mentions in blogs, number of re-tweets or saves of articles used as a measure of scientific publication (Priem, & Hemminger, 2010; Torres-Salinas et al., 2013); it follows that, a scholar’s visibility, impact of research, and scholarly contributions can be attested via many platforms (Czerniewicz et al., 2014). In this regard, Open Access (OA) is the only hub to access research outputs optimally and rapidly nowadays (Lwong, 2013). This is a threat to academic libraries, which continue to risk irrelevance in the scholarly information use practice (Schonfeld & Housewright, 2010) since most libraries have failed to employ strong technology, service policies, and marketing strategies. This is against the already established findings that indicated an increased usage of those libraries for supporting researches (Budd, 2009). This raised some questions regarding the central or marginalized role academic libraries can perform in the contemporary practices of scholars (Nyquist, 2010).

Using Google Scholar and OA in the scholarly communication system is taking over the discovery process (Burns, 2014). In the chaining process, Google is the third (70%) intermediary component in the

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