

## Chapter 11

# Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNS) as Platforms for Knowledge Sharing Among the Scholarly Community

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### ABSTRACT

*As the world becomes more networked through social media like Facebook, Twitter, etc., the academic world has also developed its own online Academic Social Networks Sites (ASNS), such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Google Scholar, Mendeley, Zotero, and Methodspace, just to name a few. Academics and researchers are using these platforms as alternative ways to share and disseminate their research to a wider audience to increase the visibility of their academic output, to support the sharing of data set and to connect with other scholars. However, ASNS are not only enabling researchers to form networks, but are also opening up avenues for them to interact, share ideas and knowledge, and engage in discussions that relate to research practices. The aim of this study was therefore to examine the use of ASNS by researchers and academics and its importance in knowledge sharing. Data collection was largely based on a critical review of literature relating to the use of ASNS for knowledge sharing by academics and researchers. The findings revealed that most academics and researchers are faced with many challenges that hinder the effective use of these network sites. The practice of uploading articles on ASNS has become a contentious issue with publishers claiming infringement of copyright agreements on the part of researchers. Copyright and intellectual property issues thus need to be addressed. The study also observed that, in some instances, academics and researchers were not fully involved in collaborative with other scholars. Collaboration amongst researchers is therefore recommended as it stimulates creativity and helps in addressing this complexity of research. This study, therefore, recommends that researchers can address some of ASNS challenges if they leverage on these factors because resolution of complex research problems issues can only be achieved through cross disciplinary collaboration and this can also pave the way for knowledge sharing in practice.*

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## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

The increasing application of digital technologies has brought about a massive revolution in which knowledge is created, organized, retrieved and shared. This means that both public and private sector organisations have come to rely on a growing array of digital technologies to create, store and exchange knowledge (Lemieux 2015). The relation of culture is often seen in the relationship between shared practices, knowledge sharing and shared identity development (Wenger, et al., 2002). Knowledge sharing is generally known as the knowledge flow from a single individual or part of the organisation to the other (Chua, 2004). Tsui, Chapman, Schnirer and Stewart (2006) define knowledge sharing as the process of exchanging knowledge (skills, experience, and understanding) among researchers, policymakers and service providers. Therefore, if no one is willing to share where information hoarding becomes the practice, new knowledge cannot be generated. The more we share and transfer our knowledge to other person through various channel like discussion, forum, chat session and etc, the more we get the core of that particular knowledge.

During the mid-2000s, variety of Academic Social Network Sites (ASNs) were launched as platforms for disseminating and sharing knowledge, following the success of generic platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. These network sites have gained prominence as platforms for sharing and disseminating knowledge and scholarly communication amongst researchers and academics, and has the potential to connect academics across the globe. ASNS has thus become an essential mechanism to communicate, connect and collaborate among the scholarly community and prior to these ASNS developments academics and researchers mostly relied on peer reviewed journals and conferences to share their research. The main advantage of ASNS is that research can be disseminated and shared in real time, thus circumventing the waiting period before it can be published in a journal or an institutional repository.

Drula (2009) describes social networking sites as platforms for people to connect with others; share ideas, activities, and personal details; communicate, and keep track of activities of people and organisations of their interest that share connection with them. Papadopoulos et al. (2013) further described these network sites as activities people use to share knowledge in a collaborative environment. Social media is the means of interaction between people in which they create, share and exchange knowledge and ideas within virtual communities and networks (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Social network sites have provided a new way of communication process where academics and researchers can increase their knowledge base, remain updated and form new connections. Three main characteristics of ASNS are content creation and sharing (Kietzmann et al., 2011), openness of the resources and building and maintaining relationships (Muscat, 2012). Knowledge transfer not only includes simple sharing or transferring of information but also implicate increased interaction among the academic fraternity (Ahmed et al., 2018). The advent of ASNS has however, changed the way academics disseminate their research. ASNS such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate provide online hosting space for academics to upload their articles as a form of self-archiving and allow researchers and academics to publish their academic articles for online open access and engage in professional interaction. Despite the network being a defining characteristic of these network sites, the platforms position themselves in competition with the scholarly publishing industry rather than social media. As a result, the platforms represent a form of black or guerilla Open Access publishing (Penn, 2018). Therefore, as a mode of Open Access publishing, ASNS offer benefits in terms of speed and control in comparison to Institutional Repositories (IRs).

Social network sites usage has increased from 1.97 billion users in 2010 to 2.62 billion in 2018 (Statista, 2018). However, academics and researchers are still faced with some problems to effective use and

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