Increased Visibility in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH)

Results of a survey at the University of Vienna
Executive Summary 2017 English version

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Abstract

This report provides an overview of a survey about increasing visibility in the social sciences and humanities (SSH), which was carried out at the University of Vienna in 2016. This survey was directed at the scientific personnel of all faculties corresponding to these disciplines. The participants were asked about the following topics: searching and finding; publishing; visibility; assessment of research performance (publications). Within this context the survey was used to determine the different publication habits in these disciplines. Based on the results desired infrastructure and services can be tailored to the needs of the participating researchers.

Keywords

University of Vienna; social sciences; humanities; SSH; researcher; visibility; increasing visibility; survey; report

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The full report (German only) is either available at Zenodo *(dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.400965)* or Phaidra *(http://phaidra.univie. ac.at/o:526603).*
Detailed statistical data can also be downloaded from both systems: *dx.doi.org/10.5281/ zenodo.437152* or *http://phaidra.univie. ac.at/o:526606*

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report offers an overview of a survey concerned with (increasing) the visibility of research outputs in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), which was conducted as part of an internal university project undertaken by the Department for Bibliometrics and Publication Strategies of Vienna University Library and supported by the Scientometrics Working Group and the Rectorate. This survey was addressed to the scientific staff in all the SSH faculties at the University of Vienna.

The participants were asked questions on the following topic areas:

- Searching and finding
- Publishing
- Visibility
- Assessment of research outputs (publications)

The enquiry conducted in this context primarily served to survey the various publication cultures in the SSH. Taking the existing disciplinary diversity into account the insights serve to improve the required infrastructure and offered services in accordance with the needs expressed by the respondents.

Background

Visibility and assessment of research outputs in the Social Sciences and Humanities is currently gaining attention at an international level, since, in contrast to the medical or technically oriented disciplines and the natural sciences, existing scientometric methods do not seem to meet the demands of these disciplines.

Like many international universities, the University of Vienna is striving to make research outputs in the SSH more visible. Systematic knowledge of the specifics of the respective knowledge cultures is required, in order to develop measures and services, which respond to the needs of researchers.

Methodology

The questionnaire is based on the interview guidelines of a previous project in 2014, which were adapted for the online survey. It was produced in German and English and programmed by Vienna University's Unit for Quality Assurance with the webbased EvaSys evaluation and survey software. The survey period ran from 1st June to 8th July 2016. Out of 3567 questionaires sent out, 524 complete responses were received and could be analysed (response rate 14.7%). To analyse the survey data, they were exported from EvaSys and analysed further in SPSS, Excel and QCAmap. The subject discipline, employment group, age group and sex of the participants were taken into account in the analyses.

Key findings

Searching and finding

– Google Scholar (GS) is used for literature research by almost two thirds of those surveyed; this is used twice as frequently as the two multi-disciplinary citation databases, Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus taken together.

– Multi-disciplinary data sources tend to be used more frequently by the more senior grades of researchers.

– The preferred research tools in the SSH are library catalogues, search engines provided by libraries and Internet search engines, followed by full text databases and subject-specific bibliographical databases.

Publishing

– Those surveyed most often publish articles in scientific journals (just under four fifths) and book contributions (two thirds). Only one fifth of the researchers mentioned monographs as the most frequent type of publication.

– English and German are the leading languages of publication. Senior Researchers produce English language output predominantly.

– For four fifths, the topic is the most important criterion for the choice of a journal as a publication channel, followed by quality control through peer review and audience for almost half of those surveyed.

– Just under two thirds of those surveyed rate the name of the publishing house and its associated reputation as the most important criterion in selecting book publishers. In this case peer review plays only a subordinate role.

– Publishing upon invitation of colleagues is a common practice; conversely publishing

upon invitation of publishers is significantly less frequent. In both cases, it is most frequently Senior Researchers, who receive such invitations.

– Co-authorship is common in the Social Sciences, whereas in the Humanities collaborative publishing is still the exception. In this case again, it is the Senior Researchers who are most frequently involved.

– In the Social Sciences the order of authors is mostly defined by proportion of contribution, whereas the Humanities predominantly use alphabetic order.

– The majority of more senior researchers write up to four reviews annually.

– Editing activities are undertaken less frequently in the Social Sciences than in the Humanities. In general Senior Researchers take the role of editors.

– Almost equal percentages of those surveyed were aware, or not aware of the relevance of providing a minimum amount of information in English for the purposes of indexing in international multi-disciplinary databases when publishing and editing publications in languages other than English. Awareness was decidedly more pronounced in the Social Sciences.

Visibility

– More than two thirds of those surveyed never heard of the recommendations from the Rectorate on increasing visibility in the SSH.

– Half of the researchers considered it important that publication output should be displayed in the u:cris portal; half of the researchers considered this unimportant.

– Almost every second researcher prefers a web presence linked to the institution without provision of full texts. More than 40% are involved in Academia.edu, somewhat

more than one third uses ResearchGate. More than 20% of all persons surveyed maintain a Google Scholar Citations profile, every seventh an ORCID profile. Personal profiles on Google Scholar and ResearchGate are more frequent in the Social Sciences, whereas Academia.edu is more popular in Theology and the Humanities.

– Every third person surveyed uses mailing lists for self-marketing, every fifth person surveyed uses Facebook and every tenth person uses Twitter for these purposes.

– In each case, just under half of those surveyed are aware or unaware of Vienna University's open-access policy. To date, only one fifth has operated open-access self-archiving in any form whatsoever. To date less than one third have published in open-access journals.

Assessment of research outputs (publications)

– More than half responded that they approve the use of citation counts as impact indicators in the SSH. However, this approval should be regarded critically due to the large number of relativistic or negative free text elaborations. Seen from a disciplinary perspective approval comes for the most part from the Social Sciences and the negative responses from the Humanities. Approval also reduces to a great extent with career advancement.

– Views and downloads were similarly evaluated as indicators for assessing the societal impact of publications. Somewhat more than half are positive, more than two fifths are negative. The highest degree of approval comes from pre-docs and teaching staff.

– Almost two thirds were interested in the resonance of their own publication output on the social web. The greatest interest was shown by pre-docs.

– Services to assist in the management of self-marketing of research outputs would be welcomed by a clear majority of the participants with no clear differences between disciplines. Post-docs and pre-docs showed the greatest interest in this. Institutional and operational support in maintaining personal profiles, both internal and external to the university, on a variety of platforms would be welcomed. Similarly the improvement of university systems for specific target groups/audiences and the interoperability of such systems among themselves and with platforms external to the university would also be appreciated.

– The qualitative analysis of the free text responses (n ≥ 10) revealed that the most significant other criteria for assessing scientific outputs and performance were predominantly:

  • quality of content
  • reputation extending to the overall assessment of the person
  • societal impact and relevance
  • academic reception and impact
  • reviews
  • teaching
  • long-term impact.

Recommendations

It can be ascertained in the international context that visibility and impact in the SSH have become important topics for researchers, research policy-makers and research funders. At the same time, it is obvious that traditional bibliometric procedures range from only moderately suitable to unsuitable for these disciplines, hence new approaches are required. This is exemplified with the Horizon 2020 ACCOMPLISSH[1] project, launched in March 2016, which is attempting to raise awareness of the potential impact – both in the SSH and also for the broader scientific community, industry, politics and society – and fitting very well within the framework of our initiative at Vienna University.

The following measures can be inferred from the survey on raising visibility of research outputs in the SSH conducted for the University of Vienna:

– Gaining further knowledge with respect to the various publication cultures
– Optimisation of the use of e-resources offered
– Optimisation of the available infrastructure
– Intensified raising of awareness of available policies and recommendations and their monitoring
– Further development of existing services and development of new services to support research
– Exploration of new metrics and evaluation methods.

Gaining further knowledge with respect to publication cultures

It has become obvious during the course of this and the previous project how diverse and different the disciplines, which are subsumed under the term SSH, are from one another. The respective publication cultures are equally different, which understandably makes assessing research outputs more difficult. The principle of the smallest common denominator therefore seems to promise little success, since the individual SSH disciplines cannot be measured with the same yardstick. Accordingly, measures to increase visibility and to assess research outputs must take account of the specific publication cultures.

Building on the findings of the survey, an attempt to gain further knowledge on the various publication cultures by means of specifically targeted interviews should be made. For this purpose, in particular, young scientists should be addressed in order to ascertain which concepts for the acquisition of a scientific reputation are persued within each subject culture. The wider base gained from this is essential for the successful implementation of the following recommendations.

Optimisation of the use of e-resources offered

The University of Vienna provides to its researchers a comprehensive range of e-resources, which according to the findings of the survey, is used to an insufficient extent both in terms of quantity and in terms of quality. Hence it is appropriate to intensify training measures for researchers (including young scientists), focussing on the choice and use of e-resources relevant in the SSH with regard to publication strategies in cooperation with e-Resource Management and the public relations work of the University Library, as well as Research Services.

[1] http://www.accomplissh.eu/#accomplissh

In this area, also subject-specific preferences for the selection and focus of their respective training measures should be taken into account, in order to achieve an appropriate level of acceptance.

Optimisation of the available infrastructure

The existence of a suitable infrastructure to document, edit, and display research output is self-evidently a basic prerequisite for an appropriate level of visibility of these outputs by individuals and by the university. The current co-existence of a variety of university systems, such as u:cris (research documentation), u:scholar (institutional repository), Phaidra (digital asset management system) and institutional websites as well as platforms external to the university, such as Academia.edu, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, Mendeley, etc. is difficult to understand for many researchers. Because of missing interoperable interfaces between systems, usability problems arise, since researchers are currently forced to enter their output in several copies into a variety of systems of their choice. Accordingly, optimisation and coordination of the various systems is urgently required. This should include stakeholders from all subject cultures and take into account national and international initiatives.

Intensified raising of awareness of available policies and recommendations and their monitoring

Policies and recommendations are valuable guides; however, they remain ineffective, if their target audience remains unaware of them. In order to achieve a positive change in the actual situation, a well-placed information campaign by the Public Relations Department on behalf of the Rectorate is indicated, in order to make researchers aware of the open-access policy, the affiliation policy and the recommendations on increasing visibility in the SSH. Success should be ensured by means of monitoring by the University Library in cooperation with the Unit for Quality Assurance of the University of Vienna.

Further development of existing and development of new services to support research

Entering of data related to research outputs into various systems and the maintenance of an individual profile is linked to considerable expenditure of time for researchers. A clear majority of those surveyed at the University of Vienna want support in this respect. Appropriate services should be designed, on the one hand to advise researchers in choosing the system(-s), which will be most effective in meeting their goals and on the other, to support them in accomplishing and managing this operationally. Setting up a one-stop-shop solution for requirements and services at the university is recommended. Furthermore it is advisable to identify and nominate contact partners and experts for the individual faculties, who could serve as multiplicators in support of the researchers. Implementing a variety of advisory services on scientific publishing and communication, as well as a variety of training measures should round off this package of measures.

Exploration of new metrics and evaluation methods

Due to the lack of fitness of citation-based metrics and evaluation methods in the SSH, suitable alternatives must be found. New metrics, such as usage metrics, altmetrics and article level metrics, offer the possibility of tracking the use and reception of SSH research output beyond the traditional 'publish or perish' community. Furthermore, the Department for Bibliometrics and Publication Strategies at the University of Vienna should be actively involved in developing suitable new indicators and evaluation methods for the various SSH disciplines, which are in accordance with the different publication cultures. In cooperation with early career scientists new tools should be tested, including their suitability of being integrated into existing systems (within the university).