Seeking Impact and Visibility

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Published by African Minds

Kell, Catherine and Henry Trotter.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/32990.

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African scholarly research is relatively invisible globally because even though research production on the continent is growing in absolute terms, it is falling in comparative terms. In addition, traditional metrics of visibility, such as the Impact Factor, fail to make legible all African scholarly production. Many African universities also do not take a strategic approach to scholarly communication to broaden the reach of their scholars’ work.

To address this challenge, the Scholarly Communication in Africa Programme (SCAP) was established to help raise the visibility of African scholarship by mapping current research and communication practices in Southern African universities and by recommending and piloting technical and administrative innovations based on open-access dissemination principles. To do this, SCAP conducted extensive research in four faculties at the Universities of Botswana, Cape Town, Mauritius and Namibia. SCAP found that scholars:

- carry heavy teaching and administrative loads which hinder their research productivity
- remain unconvinced by open access dissemination
- find it easier to collaborate with scholars in the global North than in the rest of Africa
- rarely communicate their research with government
- engage in small, locally-based research projects that are either unfunded or funded by their universities
- produce outputs that are often interpretive, derivative or applied due, in part, to institutional rewards structures and funding challenges
- do not utilise social media technologies to disseminate their work or seek new collaborative opportunities.

All of these factors impact Africa’s research invisibility at a time when scholarly communication is going through dramatic technical, legal, social and ethical changes.

Seeking Impact and Visibility shares the results of SCAP’s research and advocacy efforts. It not only analyses these four universities’ scholarly communication ecosystems, but illuminates the opportunities available for raising the visibility of their scholarship. It concludes with a series of recommendations that would enhance the communicative and developmental potential of African research.

This study will be of interest for scholars of African higher education, academically-linked civil society organisations, educationally-affiliated government personnel and university researchers and managers.