Chapter 34
Mapping the Dissemination of the Theory of Social Representations via Academic Social Networks

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the role of academic social networks in the dissemination of the social representations literature. In particular, it takes into account 9414 entries filed in the specialized SoReCom "A.S. de Rosa" @-library. Each entry was assessed concerning the presence of the publication in the three academic social networks (Academia.edu, ResearchGate, and Mendeley), which amounted to 2956 total entries. The publications on social representations found in academic social networks have undergone some of the comparative analyses based on "big data" and "meta-data" filed in the SoReCom "A.S. de Rosa" @-library repositories, concerning authors' countries and institutional affiliations, years of publication by year, type of publication, etc. This allowed presenting the geo-mapping of the wider scientific production in social representations and comparative results with different types of publications. Overall, the academic social networks constitute excellent allies in spreading knowledge in spite of their still relatively modest use.

INTRODUCTION

Academic social networks are forms of Internet service, which facilitate the management of relations among scientists, sharing resources for publications, and in some case data, research results and multi-media sources. This chapter concentrates on what are the benefits of academic social networks, how to analyze their impact in spreading knowledge and why they are important. In particular, it aims at mapping the presence of publications using the case study of the theory of social representations in three academic social networks: Academia.edu, ResearchGate and Mendeley.

Academia.edu was founded in September 2008 by Richard Price, who did a PhD at Oxford in philosophy. After finishing his PhD, he founded Academia.edu, which is a platform for academics around the world to connect and share research, which in October 2016 had more than 43 million members. He spotted the need for the platform when doing his PhD. Once freely registered, a user can set his or her profile and fill in their publication list, upload papers and enlist field(s) of interest, finding at the same time researchers with a matching profile. Then, it is possible to follow what academics in the field are working on, i.e. the latest papers they are publishing, the talks they are giving or the blog posts and status updates they are writing. An important tool that Academia.edu offers is the statistic of one's downloads and page views; it also allows the researcher to know what keywords people use to search for them on Google (Giglia, 2011).

Research Gate, founded in 2008 by physicians Dr. Ijad Madisch (Boston) and Dr. Sören Hofmayer (Berlin), and computer scientist Horst Fickenscher (Berlin), is aimed at creating a working and discovering network among scientists, "Discover", "Communicate" and "Collaborate" are its main purposes (Giglia, 2011). In October 2016 it had more than 11 million members.

London-based *Mendeley*, founded in 2009 by three German PhD students (Victor Henning, Jan Reichelt and Paul Föckler), in October 2016 was used by around 2.5 million researchers worldwide to discover, share and annotate research papers (as a reference manager), and to network and collaborate with other academics (Giglia, 2011). Mendeley has two components: a desktop program and a web-based storage space, which can be used independently or synchronized (MacMillan, 2012).

The main differences among these three academic social networks can be summarized as below:

- *Academia.edu* and *ResearchGate.net* focus more on the producers of research and their networking (main function: "to be contacted");
- While reference-sharing *Mendeley.com* sites focus on readers, helping users to share and find relevant references for their work (main function: "discover recommended papers"),

One difference still existing in October 2016 is that *Academia.edu* users can post their own papers, but *Mendeley* users can also share others' papers in their *My Library* section (Thelwall & Kousha, 2014).

Overall, it has been found that different disciplines favor different academic social networks and some authors argue that at some point there will be a "winner in the race" (van Norden, 2014). At the moment awareness among scientists of the Academic Social Networks varies, but the most well-known site tends to be Google Scholar, both among natural and social scientists, as stated by van Norden (2014).

If the Personal Social Networks have become exponentially popular among lay people by sharing personal information, snapshots on private life, CV, or even for institutions and companies aimed at their web-marketing; turning to a scholars and researchers target, the academic social networks, born in 2008, have quickly become a fundamental tool to manage, read, share, annotate and cite research

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