Can promotion of open content via Twitter increase repository traffic and the visibility of online resources?

**BACKGROUND**

Open content provides significant opportunities for research and educational purposes – particularly in the many contexts where limited or non-existent access to resources is a serious constraint (Abrahams et al. 2008). There are, however, concerns around the uneven spread of online content in terms of geographical original and language.

While it can be considered a global issue, the visibility challenge is particularly acute for scholars in Sub-Saharan Africa, whose publication activity only accounts for 3.1% of formal global knowledge production (UNESCO 2010). The challenge is made more acute by the fact that only a narrow form of output is foregrounded and measured (i.e. books and journal articles), whereas it has been found that Southern African scholars produce a wide range of scholarly output types (Trotter et al. 2014).

Repositories provide significant affordances for promoting the visibility of a wide range of scholarly outputs, particularly as they make provision for the association of rich metadata that increases the likelihood of content surfacing in internet searches. While crucial, curation of online content is however increasingly considered to be insufficient for optimal visibility – these efforts need to be matched by interventions to actively promote content amongst interested networks and user groups.

Social media tools such as Twitter are useful for promoting content and penetrating networks. This experiment set out to investigate whether the promotion of content via Twitter could increase the visibility of resources and boost repository traffic to those resources.

**FINDINGS**

1. **Remarkable spike in repository activity** (in the form of ‘views’) in the promotion activity month, with 10 of the 15 profiled resources showing over 100% increase in views as a result of only three to five directed tweets on each.

2. **Number of visits did generally not recede to initial levels in the month directly after Twitter activity**, indicating that these singular promotional acts have an impact in terms of file visits and visibility beyond just the ‘moment’ in which they are communicated.

3. **The resource with the highest percentage of increased views in the un-promoted resources was ‘How to create a species list from the Virtual Museum’**, which enjoyed increased visibility as a result of promotion activity. This suggests that the un-promoted resource may have enjoyed a spill-over effect in increased visibility from the promotion activity.

**REFERENCES**


**METOD**

The methodology for the experiment consisted of three components:

1. **Selection of content sample**

2. **Promotion of content through Twitter**

3. **Collection of data through site statistics**

The experiment was conducted over a three-month period (August to October 2014). Sample resources for posting purposes were selected from the OpenUCT and OpenALDRU repositories at the University of Cape Town. Fifteen resources were selected for promotion with a corresponding number identified for control purposes. The sample set of resources was comprised of a variety of output types, the only criteria being that they should be openly available (i.e. not behind publisher paywalls).

In the first month of the experiment (August 2014), statistics of repository views for each resource were captured.

In the second month of the experiment (September 2014), a selected sub-set of resources was promoted via Twitter. Tweets were drafted by extracting ‘sound bites’ from the resources, i.e. phrases that were seen to reflect a key finding or highlight a pertinent issue contained within the resource. Each tweet included the sound bite, a handle (persistent identifier) where the resource could be accessed in a repository, and a number of relevant hashtags. They followed a consistent structure to highlight a pertinent issue contained within the resource. Each tweet included the sound bite, a handle (persistent identifier) where the resource could be accessed in a repository, and a number of relevant hashtags. They followed a consistent structure.

In the third month of the experiment (October 2014), there were no Twitter activity on the profile resources and statistics on views received in this month were captured once again.

**UN-PROMOTED RESOURCES (CONTROL)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESOURCE TITLE</th>
<th>RESOURCE TYPE</th>
<th>PROMOTION ACTIVITY</th>
<th>INCREASED VIEWS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do seasonally driven spatial patterns in demography/variation in survival of African red woodhoopoe Amaurornis biastachta in central eastern South Africa reflect global patterns</td>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to create a species list from the Virtual Museum projects</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Science - Special Days</td>
<td>Sound file</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making urgent the need for the Southern African biodiversity red list</td>
<td>Sound file</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to create a species list from the Virtual Museum projects</td>
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**REFERENCES**

