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Storying Research: Conducting Research in New Formats and New Voices

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Abstract

The session engages with an acute tension evident in scholarly communication: We are witnessing a great deal of innovation and experimentation in relation to the way research is performed and shared. The push towards, and need for, innovation and creativity in academic research is being emphasized to an ever increasing extent. A rich set of digital tools and transdisciplinary engagements have opened the door for research conducted and reported in increasingly hybridised, dynamic and interactive ways. At the same time, academic research is increasingly being evaluated by focusing on quantitative analyses based on publications; analyses which privilege established scholarly practices and publication venues. In the session, we are interested in exploring collectively on the one hand, the voice in and position from which we report on research and – indeed – conduct research. On the other hand, how do we use documents and artefacts to tell our stories? Digital media provide new affordances through a broader selection of modes of representation to present data, results and argumentation. The session is conducted as a 'conversation café', where each café table focuses on one aspect of these opportunities.

Keywords: research practice, multimodality, creativity, scholarly publishing

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1 Overview

The session engages with an acute tension evident in scholarly communication. We are witnessing a great deal of innovation and experimentation in relation to the way research is performed and shared (e.g.: Borgman, 2007; Cyberinfrastructure Council, 2007). As a consequence of multimodal opportunities within the scholarly ecosystem (Sugimoto & Thelwall, 2013) in combination with institutional and national imperatives (e.g.: Ministry of Education and Research [Sweden], 2012; Research and Innovation Council of Finland, 2010), innovation and creativity in academic research is being emphasized to an ever increasing extent. A rich set of digital tools and transdisciplinary engagements have opened the door for research conducted, discussed and reported in increasingly hybridised, dynamic and interactive ways (Francke, 2008; Kjellberg, 2010). At the same time, academic research is in many countries being evaluated through quantitative analyses based on publications — analyses which privilege established scholarly practices and publication venues. Not only do the evaluation systems greatly limit the forms of expression that are valued for communicating research, but they also carry the risk of emphasizing a certain segment of publication channels available, and encouraging 'safe' or immediately recognizable research deemed to have the greatest potential of attracting citations from the research community (DORA, 2012).

Research is an inherently creative practice which comes under pressure because of tensions associated with publishing imperatives and organisational challenges (Anderson, 2011). In the session,

participants will explore collectively two ways to encourage creativity in research. Firstly, how information studies researchers can broaden the researchers' spectrum when it comes to conducting and telling the story of research by adopting innovative approaches from various theoretical and methodological perspectives and from the arts. Secondly, digital media provide new affordances through a broader selection of modes of representation to present data, results and argumentation, i.e. to tell stories of research. Examples include research datasets published in journals (e.g. http://openarchaeologydata.metajnl.com/), laboratory work presented as film to allow the laboratory conditions for an experiment to be replicated (e.g. http://www.jove.com/), and academic work portrayed in the aesthetics of documentary videos (e.g. http://www.audiovisualthinking.org/) or images (Hartel & Thomson, 2011). That research is performed differently in different disciplines has been known for a long time (e.g. Becher & Trowler, 2001; Knorr-Cetina, 1999; Whitley, 2000). Acceptance and promotion of using creative and innovative voices and modes of representation in telling the story of research are also clearly influenced by disciplinary needs, interests, and traditions. If, in information studies, we draw inspiration from other fields and develop our own approaches to conducting and reporting research creatively, we also need to discuss how this research will be fairly evaluated within our own field and in the broader research policy landscape.

The session organisers, who offer a rich range of experience and insight about the contemporary research climate, share a common belief in the value innovative forms of scholarship have for enhancing our research impact and for our engagement with the very communities that we study and hope to support through our research. The session will provide a possibility to reflect upon and discuss the participants' own research (publishing) practices, as well as those practices observed in the research community.

2 Purpose and Intended Audience

We aim to make the session interactive by drawing the audience deliberately into active engagement with the topics discussed. Therefore, we propose a 'conversation café' format to identify ways to move forward as a community and as individual scholars and professionals in relation to two broad areas of concern:

- Can the push for innovation and creativity in doing/reporting research and expectations of indicator-based research evaluation be reconciled?
- What are the possibilities and potential for broadening the voices and modes of representation we use in telling stories of our research through academic publishing?

The proposed interactive session is targeted towards two groups:

1. Participants contemplating creative techniques for storying their research.
2. Participants interested in scholarly communication as a research or professional phenomenon.

3 Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field

This event speaks to conference themes by exploring ways to break down walls in relation to scholarly communication; culture, context and computing all figure in the story of research we wish to discuss with our audience. The session addresses the forms and role of publishing in our field, which can appeal to a wide audience ranging from experienced researchers and practitioners to research students.

4 Format of the Activity

The interactive session will follow a 'conversation café' format designed to encourage large group dialogue (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). To initiate the conversations, the organisers introduce some of the issues in very short opening statements from our different perspectives. Next, participants discuss the topics and move around café tables for three rounds of activity as follows:

1st iteration (focusing): The first group initiates by looking for ideas and opening up the discussion rather than searching for a solution.
2nd iteration (deepening & connecting): Starting with a summary of the first group, the second group seeks to deepen thinking about the topic.
3rd iteration (moving forward): Building on the work of the first two rounds, the third round is about finding ways forward. In particular we want to focus what can be done to advance the issue beyond the conference.

The organisers will facilitate and document the process at each café table, using the following starter topics to seed discussion:

- Table 1 – Reinterpreting the voice and role of the researcher
- Table 2 – Remediating the scholarly article in new modes of representation
- Table 3 – Reporting research in new formats and implications for research evaluation
- Table 4 – Revisiting measures of research impact: What 'counts' as research?
- Table 5 – Recognising creativity: valuing creative techniques mindfully within the research process

At the end of the final round, each table will present the outcomes of their table topic as part of a closing discussion about ways to carry momentum from this session into the future. What could happen next? Should there be more? What partnerships might enable this work to take place? Outcomes will be disseminated to participants in a format decided at the event.

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