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TRUST AND AUTHORITY
IN SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION
IN THE LIGHT OF THE DIGITAL TRANSITION

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CIBER RESEARCH

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TRUST funding and researchers

- Funded by Sloan foundation
- Principal investigators Professor David Nicholas CIBER and Professor Carol Tenopir UTK
- Three stages: focus groups (15), interviews (87), and survey
- This phase of the project was mainly concerned with US and UK researchers
- Most academic contacts came through major publishers including open access publishers and their comparative skills at finding interviewees determined sample
- Only first two stages analysed and working through survey. This presentation is concerned with qualitative phase of project
- See www.ciber-research.eu for full proposal and to give background
- First paper will be on citations and other papers will follow –see site

TRUST aims, intention and experience

- The context is the digital revolution and how academic behaviour changes
- ‘how researchers assign and calibrate authority and trustworthiness to the sources and channels they choose to use, cite, and publish in’ is the concise description of the aims of the study
- We have tried not to impose models from the literature but to start from researcher pre-occupations
- We did not need to define “trust”: researchers knew what the concept meant to them.
- There were probably too many social scientists in our sample but differences in practice were not significant – with exceptions
- Some of the researchers came from top universities but not all: they were researchers not practitioners and we interviewed them as researchers not teachers
- Most researchers were mature but there were enough old and young to make generalisations – the young researchers were committed to a research career

TRUST Change – broad issues

- Our previous researches have shown that you cannot isolate academic behaviour online from general online behaviour and that changes a lot
- The bottom line is that everyone was much more conservative than we had expected
- For the researchers ease in discovery and ease in publishing recognised and welcomed
- Access was mostly not a problem and even when not in libraries papers could be found easily at least for mature researchers
- Journal publishing absolutely central but there were complaints about the way the system operated.
- Open access seen as a good idea but there was a general distrust of OA journals – not PLOS One which was widely recognised and admired
- Use of social media was minimal but individual researchers used others as proxies.
- Information overload not a big deal – more poor “stuff” but more good
- Change and perhaps serious disruption seen by many as just round the corner

TRUST – Using Information

- Reading the “complete” article and not the abstract seen as essential and part of the way trust was established
- Familiarity was very important with journal, institution and particularly authors
- Researchers existed in a networked circle of trust which was built up and refreshed at conferences and recommendations within circle = trust
- Multidisciplinary research meant that you had to rely on others for trust
- Mature researchers showed confidence in perceiving quality by checking out equations, statistics, tables and images but younger researchers not always yet as confident
- There was preferential use of Google (Scholar) for discovery as has been found before: there was an “ingrained search and usage strategy”.
- Rather surprisingly there was a greater reliance on and trust in Wikipedia than has been found in previous research and change recognised by interviewees

TRUST - Metrics

- Metrics not really important for Trust
- Disciplinary ranking of journals more important than IF
- Number of citations looked for and respected
- Altmetrics as a term not known and in practice not known
- HOWEVER any metric that ranked researchers and provided numbers relished at all levels

TRUST Groups

- Scientific researchers not individuals but part of groups with roles – see RIN life sciences 2009
- Groups organised to get grants and senior researchers very busy supplying their groups
- Some social scientists also in groups too but less in US (possibly a feature of the sample)
- Younger social scientists had remaining mentor relationships as did retired scientists from other end
- Groups including international members whose connections continue when they moved on or back
- Groups met at conferences with other respected groups but not usually groups based in emerging countries

TRUST Peer Review

- Significant but not blind trust in peer review both for reading and publishing
- In focus groups editors discussed processes actively including plagiarism
- Some saw organisation of peer review as main role of publisher
- Some claimed to go to website to look at peer review processes in unknown journal
- Most researchers worried about time taken on processing peer review but also keen on good practice in proper peer review and high rejection rates

TRUST Social Media

- The lack of serious engagement by most even among social scientists and younger researchers a big surprise to us
- Participation rejected by many on basis of time taken up and noise from unqualified people.
- Social media as a source of information not trusted though some social scientists found it a source of ideas
- However all knew people who blogged and tweeted and there was a recognised role in outreach : something for the future
- Some used networking tools like Academia.edu and Research Gate but seemed to do so gingerly

TRUST Open Access

Why was there such hostility on the whole to open access journals?

- Was it just lack of familiarity – not quite?
- So- called predatory open access journals hit the inbox several times a week
- Ideas that author paid leads to pay and get published gets through to some editors
- Experience particularly good author experience can counter this
- New OA journals started by “your” publisher are trusted
- No real interest in green versus gold debate and an overall lack of knowledge

TRUST Citations 1

The central part of the interviews was the responses to the critical incident analysis of five references of a recently published paper by the interviewee.

- There are two theories in the literature concerned with why researchers cite – either because of the intellectual influence of the work cite or in order to create an impression or to persuade (the social and power context). Our answer will be nuanced but primarily in the first camp.
- Most researchers followed a similar referencing approach but some of the social scientists were originally historians and followed humanities customs
- Authors hold a database of classic papers and books which enshrine the introduction of the foundation ideas and subsequent developments
- To a large extent citation was a new project separate from the original literature search when the grant was sought/ idea developed

TRUST Citations 2

- The questions were:
 - 1 What made you include this citation?
 - 2.How did you decide if this was a trustworthy (plus synonyms) source?
 - 3.Do you remember how you found it?
 4. Was the source you searched e.g. Google a factor of trustworthiness
- The actual interview was less controlled than this might suggests in some cases where for example the interviewer chose questions not interviewee

TRUST Citations 3

- Here is the simple analysis of reasons for trusting a citation in order of number of responses
 1. The author was known to the researcher
 2. The journal or conference was known to the researcher
 3. The reference was a seminal work in the field
 4. The reference supported the methodology
 5. The research group/institution was known to the researcher

This is a preliminary analysis

TRUST Citations 4

- Broadly, conference proceedings were cited only when a journal article was not available
- Preprints did not figure at all in this connection and nor (to our surprise) did data except in a small number of cases. This could be due to the sample.
- Sometimes items (reports) are cited when there is nothing else available and even but not ideally when the resource is not regarded as entirely reliable (in development studies for example)
- We did not have astronomers on our list but we did have computer scientists and mathematical physicists among those interviewed and, although practices in general were different, citation practices were much the same
- Some citations were to articles showing similar use of a technique on (say) a different material and some to show general support for ideas/results. This was more common in the social sciences but surprisingly also in sciences

TRUST Dissemination

- There were few changes apparent with traditional hierarchies of preferred journals not impacted by open access but researchers are realistic about what is possible
- There are still complaints about time taken before decisions and then before publication especially in the softer social sciences
- There was considerable dislike of REF processes and, where known, recent RCUK and HEFCE pronouncements (in the UK) and in the US the demands of tenure committees at least as assumed.
- In many disciplines ideas and some results might in an early form be proposed in in blogs or lists (mostly social sciences) and at conferences (in all disciplines but the norm in computer science/engineering).

TRUST Outreach

- Interestingly the 20% of UK REF “marks” for impact was treated seriously especially when supplemented by university policies
- Younger members of groups were asked to use social media to spread the news (particularly tweeting) and even senior people were aware of translation
- There was some evidence of use of social media as a career strategy

TRUST final remarks

- This presentation should be regarded as based on preliminary analysis and it is definitely not comprehensive.
- EASE are thanked for inviting me to speak at their event