

Reputation: new ways of building, showcasing and measuring scholarly reputation in the digital age



Dave Nicholas, CIBER Research, <http://ciber-research.eu/>

Could not be a more important scholarly topic

The main currency for the scholar is not power, as it is for the politician, or wealth, as it is for the businessman, but reputation (Becher, 1989).

Reputation matters and digital world offers many opportunities in this respect especially in regard to the visibility proffered and it is your peers who provide the judgement.

So, inevitably this is the subject of emerging socio-technical systems and they are making considerable headway, arguably, transforming the scholarly world as we shall learn.

And they are very much a disruptive force for publishers...as you probably are aware and not just in regard to reputation.

Traditionally been *very* narrowly defined and measured

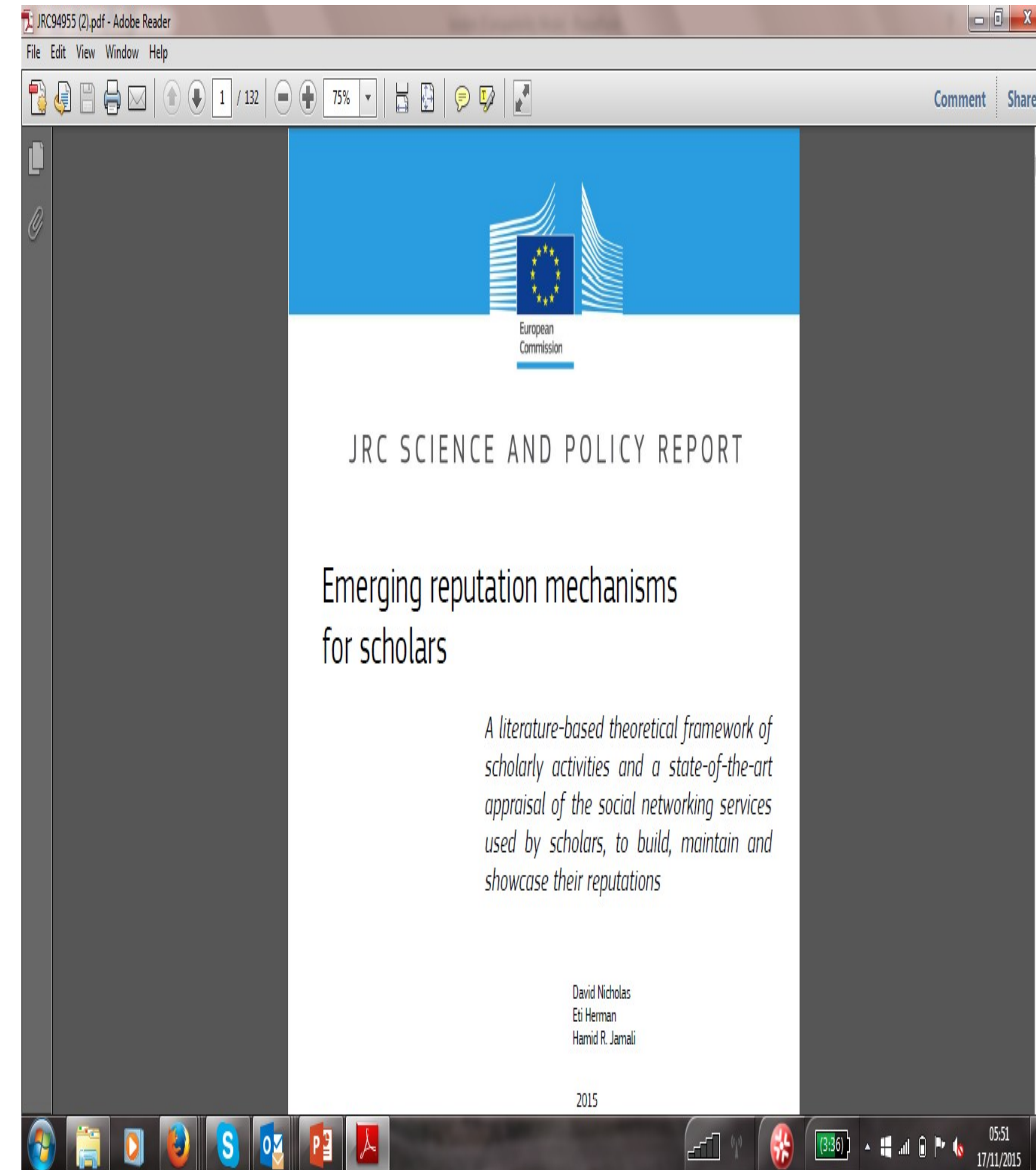
- **Built mainly around one scholarly activity** (research), one output of that activity (publication in high-impact factor, peer reviewed papers) and on one measurement of that output (citations). A once bibliographic tool defines scholarly reputation, world-wide. Warts and all.
- If anything, **practice becoming more endemic** in the competitive, global digital environment in which scholars find themselves. Chinese, Malays, Russians etc. playing catch-up and 'converts' tend to be the strongest believers.
- **Appointments made on H index scores**, conveniently served-up by Google Scholar Citations to individual, the wider-community and potential employer. It is a case of 'publish (in high impact factor journals) or perish'.
- **Tail wags the dog**. Such a narrow view of reputation suits publishers, the purveyors of papers, but marginalises the other scholarly activities and skews scholarship and academia. Not surprisingly (poor) teaching quality (and universities) are such a big issue in Europe. And we think that we can solve it all by focussing on (research) impact!

Open science: the harbinger of change?

- Open Science 2.0 disruptive, collaborative/sharing technologies (e.g. open access, open data, open lab notebooks citizen science) gives rise to new ways of scholarly working, dissemination, measurement and ushers in new 'actors'.
- Scientific reputation in the new digital age therefore needs to fall in line:
 - **Need a more inclusive definition of scholarly activities** that not only emphasises scientific excellence through high-impact publications, but also covers other key activities and their reputation building aspects - *teaching, mentoring, peer-reviewing, collaboration and outreach*.
 - **Include "new profiles" of scholars with non-traditional academic backgrounds** (e.g. free-lance scientists), or "new actors", such as citizen scientists. We are all researchers now, thanks to the big fat, open, interactive information pipe. EU's economic future tied up with this.
 - **Take account of and give full recognition for new formats** for conducting, publishing, collaborating, sharing and disseminating scholarship – blogs, social media, online communities, MOOCs.

Takes us to emerging reputation mechanisms and the EC project

- With new forms of working and new actors, evaluating and measuring scientific reputation becomes a new challenge.
- In (5 years ago!) comes novel social networking services and tools, used by scholars to support and enhance their everyday work (searching/reading), but also to build/maintain their reputation.
- It follows that the EC, a major proponent of all things open, commissioned 6 month study of emerging reputational mechanisms/platforms and its stakeholders to see what's happening.
- Stages:
 - a. Audit of scholarly activities and production of new conceptual framework;
 - b. Evaluation of existing reputation platforms/mechanisms;
 - c. User studies (European-wide questionnaire and interviews);
 - d. Expert workshop with policy recommendations



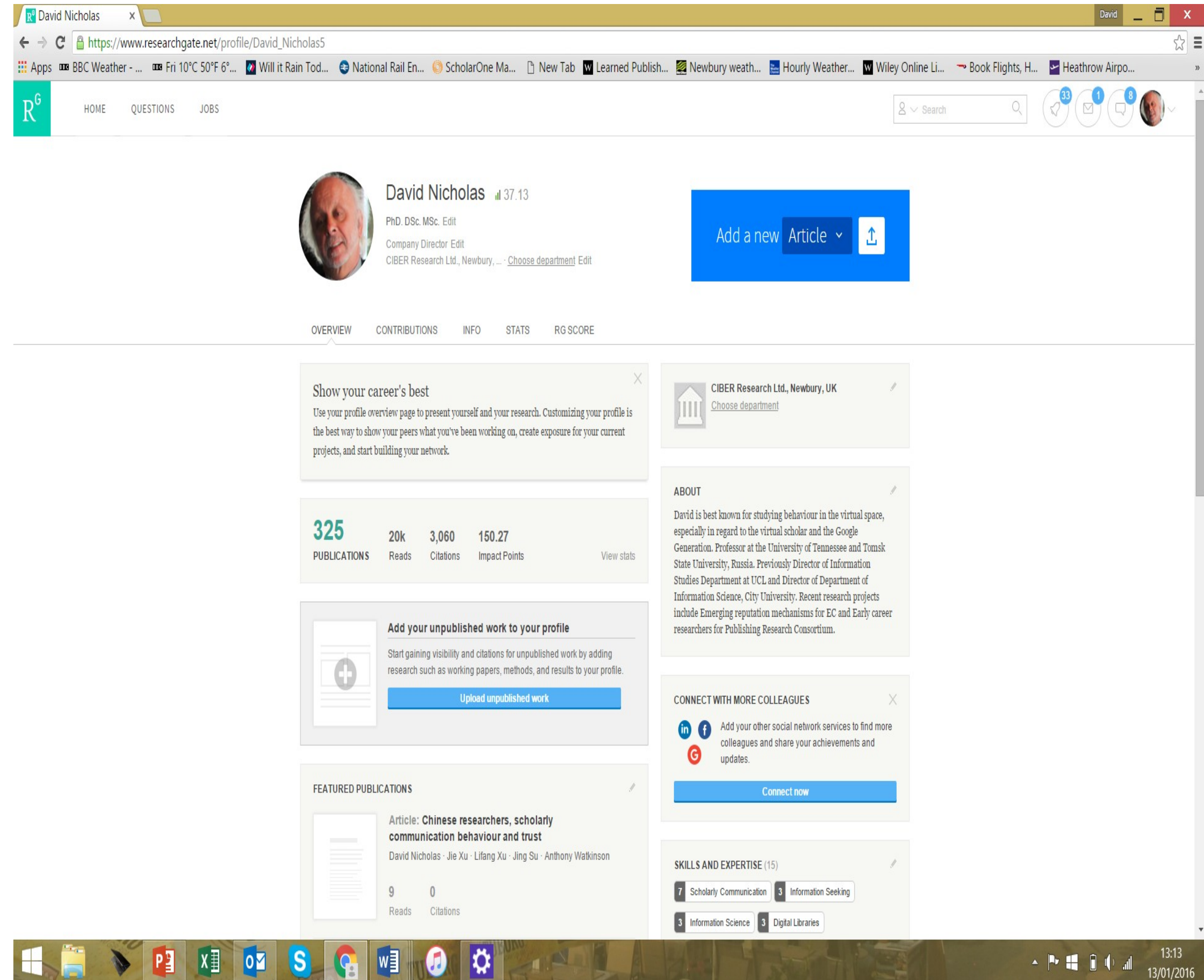
Audit of scholarly activities with reputation conferring potential (50+)

The scholarship of research	Discovery. Pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the benefit of humankind.	Nearly half of all activities	E.g. producing research outputs, obtaining funding (' <i>get grants or perish</i> '), dissemination, sharing and peer reviewing
The scholarship of integration	The arraying of extant knowledge, often within a wider, cross-disciplinary context	A fifth of all activities	E.g. literature reviews, textbooks, collaborative, inter- or multi-disciplinary projects
The scholarship of application	The application of disciplinary knowledge and skill to societal/practical problems	A fifth of all activities	E.g. consultancy and popularizing science
The scholarship of teaching	The conveying of the human store of knowledge to new generations	Less than a fifth of activities	E.g. PhD supervision and conducting a social networks based, participatory MOOC
The scholarship of co-creation	Participating in scholarly research with the public	About a tenth of activities	E.g. Citizen Science projects

Audit of emerging reputation platforms

- 25 platforms, which together supported 50% of scholarly activities, but heavily skewed towards research. None cover the whole gamut of activities. Examples: ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Impactstory, Kudos
- Activities supported include:
 - **16** research (over-abundance of activities related to releasing and disseminating research outputs)
 - **3** teaching
 - **2** application
 - **1** integration
 - **0** co-creation

Come a long way from Google Scholar Citations. Platforms barely 5 years old, with more than 50 million scholarly users and growing very fast.



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the ResearchGate profile of David Nicholas. The browser's address bar shows the URL https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Nicholas5. The profile page includes a navigation menu with 'HOME', 'QUESTIONS', and 'JOBS'. The profile header features a profile picture, the name 'David Nicholas' with a '37.13' score, and a blue button labeled 'Add a new Article'. Below the header, there are tabs for 'OVERVIEW', 'CONTRIBUTIONS', 'INFO', 'STATS', and 'RG SCORE'. The 'OVERVIEW' tab is active, showing a 'Show your career's best' section with a brief description. A statistics box displays '325 PUBLICATIONS', '20k Reads', '3,060 Citations', and '150.27 Impact Points'. There is also a section for 'Add your unpublished work to your profile' with an 'Upload unpublished work' button. The 'ABOUT' section provides a bio: 'David is best known for studying behaviour in the virtual space, especially in regard to the virtual scholar and the Google Generation. Professor at the University of Tennessee and Tomsk State University, Russia. Previously Director of Information Studies Department at UCL and Director of Department of Information Science, City University. Recent research projects include Emerging reputation mechanisms for EC and Early career researchers for Publishing Research Consortium.' A 'CONNECT WITH MORE COLLEAGUES' section offers social media links and a 'Connect now' button. The 'FEATURED PUBLICATIONS' section lists an article titled 'Chinese researchers, scholarly communication behaviour and trust' by David Nicholas, Jie Xu, Lifang Xu, Jing Su, and Anthony Watkinson, with 9 reads and 0 citations. The 'SKILLS AND EXPERTISE' section lists 'Scholarly Communication' (7), 'Information Seeking' (3), 'Information Science' (3), and 'Digital Libraries' (3).

User study: scholarly activities that contribute towards reputation

- **Confirmation that research** contributes most, with **95%** of scholars rating them as very important/ important. Conducting research, disseminating research results via journal articles/books and collaboration get highest ratings.
- **Disseminating research via blogging/tweeting** least important of 18 activities (**24%** important/very important). Could be a reputational risk.
- Another activity regarded lowly, but not as lowly as blogging, is **management/administration**, with **25%** saying important/very important.
- **Employers** rate social networking and blogging lower than scholars. Biggest difference is regarding **management**, which is considered much more important by employers.

Activity	Ranking
Conducting research	1
Disseminating research results via journal articles/books	2
Collaborating in research	3
Disseminating research results via conferences	4
Peer reviewing	5
Taking part in inter- or multi-disciplinary projects	6
Serving one's community through activities such as editorship, society posts	7
Production of literature reviews and textbooks	8
Conducting application-oriented research	9
Teaching	10
Consultancy for industry and government	11
Popularisation of scholarship	12
Designing courses and programmes	13
Production of open educational resources	14
Conducting research with lay participants	14
Disseminating research via social networking	16
Administration and management	17
Disseminating research via blogging/tweeting	18

Benefits of reputation platforms for the academic community

- a) build a dynamic *digital identity* you can control;
- b) build a reputation *more quickly*;
- c) calibrate and *benchmark* your reputation;
- d) provide greater opportunities for *collaboration*;
- e) get ongoing peer *feedback*;
- f) attract the *attention* of colleagues to your research/publications;
- g) make research and its impact more *visible* to a larger and wider audience;
- h) better understanding of who are the most valuable *contacts* in their specialism;
- i) more efficient *access* to research (no passwords/costs);
- j) be *spotted* by editorial teams, scientific authorities for jobs, conference organisers.

Negatives

- **Skewed towards research.** Platforms reflect institutional reality. Runs counter to today's changing societal priorities, which see the future of the knowledge society as depending not only on research, but also on education for all.
- **Teaching.** Much neglected and little excuse for this given EC initiatives, which see research and teaching not only as mutually dependent and reciprocally reinforcing, but also as equally important.
- **Palpable mistrust of social media, the crowd and the open** and what it can deliver in the way of reliable metrics and this stops scholars using emerging platforms. Hippy science! What of credibility/quality control?
- **Very little in the way of institutional support.** Usage of platforms very much left to the initiative and skills of the individual scholar. Could be changing with attempts at institutional buy-in.
- **Transparency.** An issue. Gaming. Needs to be a quality assessment of reputational systems if scholarly authorities and institutions are going to employ them seriously.
- Reputational systems become **too powerful**, as citation-based ones are.
- **Tower of Babel.** Confusing multiplicity of ways of providing recognition for scholarly work. Vie with each other to establish their own reputation. Balkanisation' of reputation: scholars pick the reputational system that shows them up best.

Taking stock and the future

- In every subject and country studied there are scholars using the emerging reputational platforms.
- While scholars do not currently see emerging platforms as being central tools for management of their academic reputation, do see a future potential and cautiously dipping toes in the new waters.
- Even naysayers felt **reputational platforms are the future** (heard that about Google Scholar!).
- Significantly, it is young researchers, 'the new wave' who have the **most encompassing view of reputation**. Also enables them to fast track their careers – big pressure on ECRs.
- Publishers benefit, of course, from traditional reputation, but possibly have been slow to wake-up to the new reputation paradigm. Might even lose their warehouse function.
- Case of parallel universes: impact factors have never been so important but a giant is awakening and so far the universes have not collided. Just a matter of time and an internet year is just 7 weeks.

Taking stock and the future

- Consensus view of workshop was that the platforms will spark changes, but **marginally and incrementally**. This because there are big obstacles to change, notably it is a conservative, massive, global system that has to be changed.
- But a combination of factors will ring the changes:
 - a) the unevenness and unfairness of the existing system;
 - b) digital inevitability. RG 800,000 (2008); 8,000,000 (2015);
 - c) increasing consumer (student/parent/employer) pressure to change lobby (you can find all you need about my research reputation or lack of it but nothing about my teaching);
 - d) convenience of access and availability of information;
 - e) policy directives from the EC, governments and funders.

More information

For the full reports and PowerPoint see:

http://ciber-research.eu/CIBER_projects.html

And papers see:

- Jamali, H. R., Nicholas, D., & Herman, E. 2016. Scholarly reputation in the digital age and the role of emerging platforms and mechanisms, *Research Evaluation*, accepted in press. doi: 10.1093/reseval/rvv032
- Nicholas, D.; Herman, E.; Jamali, H. R.; Bravo, B. R.; Boukacem-Zeghmouri, C.; Dobrowolski, T., and Pouchot, S. 2015. New ways of building, showcasing, and measuring scholarly reputation, *Learned Publishing*, 28 (3), 169-183
- Nicholas, D. **Reputation mechanisms and platforms: views of an expert panel on their future use, role and influence** CIBER Working paper 1

