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# THE DIGITAL ACADEMIC

Critical Perspectives on Digital Technologies  
in Higher Education

# THE DIGITAL ACADEMIC

Academic work, like many other professional occupations, has increasingly become digitised. This book brings together leading scholars who examine the impacts, possibilities, politics and drawbacks of working in the contemporary university, using digital technologies. Contributors take a critical perspective in identifying the implications of digitisation for the future of higher education; academic publishing protocols and platforms and academic employment conditions; the ways in which academics engage in their everyday work and as public scholars and relationships with students and other academics. The book includes accounts of using digital media and technologies as part of academic practice across teaching, research administration and scholarship endeavours, as well as theoretical perspectives. The contributors span the spectrum of early to established career academics and are based in education, research administration, sociology, digital humanities, media and communication.

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# 1

## THE DIGITAL ACADEMIC

Identities, contexts and politics

*Deborah Lupton, Inger Mewburn and Pat Thomson*

### Introduction

On 5 August 2016, a short piece for *The Guardian* online site (Anonymous, 2016) provoked discussion among academics on its site and various social media platforms. The piece was published in the 'Academics Anonymous' section, in which authors are not expected to reveal their identities, presumably to encourage potentially controversial opinions to be aired. Titled 'I'm a serious academic, not a professional Instagrammer', the author, who identified as a 'young PhD student, not some cranky old professor', working in science, criticised faculty members and higher degree students who were active on social media. In the article, the author described a 'selfie epidemic' in which 'We document every moment of our lives', and bemoaned that 'this culture has infiltrated the world of academia'. She or he went on to describe other academics 'live tweeting and hashtagging their way through events', suggesting that they were thus too occupied to pay proper attention to the speakers. The author characterised this behaviour as a way of self-promotion, and indeed went so far as to accuse colleagues of 'showing off' as 'proof of their dedication to the profession'. She or he not only criticised academic social media users for publicising their academic activities but also for expounding 'strong opinions' in these forums.

A week later, the piece had been shared over 3,000 times on social media and attracted over 300 comments. Another article was published in response, this time with the author's name revealed: Dean Burnett (2016). His piece was entitled 'I'm a non-serious academic. I make no apologies for this'. Taking a jocular tone, Burnett made fun of the anonymous author's claims, particularly that scientists should not be communicating with anyone outside their field or the world of the university

would behave similarly to the human society of which it is a part? It boggles the mind.

While it would probably be going too far to characterise such debates as culture wars, they signify the growing use of social media and other digital media in academia. The discussions in response to Anonymous' critique reveal some degree of controversy among academics about which media should be employed and in what ways. More broadly, these exchanges and viewpoints raise some interesting questions about contemporary academic work and its relationship to digital technologies. Since the advent of the personal computer in the mid-1980s, and the internet and the World Wide Web in the 1990s, the university sector has witnessed major changes in the ways in which teaching, research and communication with colleagues are conducted. Universities were among the first adopters of email as a mode of communication; initially as part of local networks of staff members within universities, extending to other universities and organisations as the internet developed. Since the introduction of mobile computing, Wi Fi and cloud computing, the university sector is now thoroughly saturated with opportunities for academics to communicate instantaneously with each other and with students and people outside the university across geographical regions.

Academics can choose from a plethora of digital tools to conduct teaching and research. Regular assessments are made in which the future of academic work is predicted to change even more radically in response to digitisation. At their most extreme, some pundits have predicted a future in which most university teaching will take place online, with little face-to-face instruction or interaction anymore. Dystopic predictions stretch to the complete 'unbundling' (Robertson and Komljenovic, 2016) of the university – it becomes a non-institution which contracts academic staff working from home to 'deliver' online courses developed by specialist commercially based teams.

This vision is not without some basis in reality. Simultaneous with the advent of digital technologies and their introduction into the academic workplace, academia has increasingly become part of a globalised market, and inculcated with market values emphasising corporate-oriented attributes. In the contemporary global economy, information and knowledge are valuable commodities and increasingly a source of profit (Lyon, 2013; Beer, 2013; Lash, 2007). Academics are part of this global knowledge economy, their teaching and research contributing to the reproduction, dissemination and generation of information. Academics are now highly valued, by governments in particular, for their potential contribution to wealth generation and innovation. Scholarship and learning for their own sakes have arguably become progressively devalued, making way for a vision of the university not as a community of scholars, but as a corporate enterprise – an engine to power economic demands for growth (Giroux, 2009; Burrows, 2012; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004).

The move towards universities demonstrating the ability of their research here

on the part of governments to capitalise on academic research and to demonstrate value for the funds invested in universities. Academics have been encouraged to take up such digital technologies as online learning, student feedback and referencing systems as part of their contribution to knowledge generation and the training of future knowledge workers. Most academic journals have become digitised, enabling citations to scholarly work to be automatically monitored and measured using software tools such as Google Scholar, Web of Science and Scopus. Many journals have introduced digital monitoring of such aspects as views, downloads and social media discussions of the work they publish, sometimes displaying the 'altmetric' (alternative metrics) scores individual articles have achieved in receiving attention on social media. Academics are also now often encouraged by publishers and their universities to use such tools as open access publishing, blogs and social media to promote their research and facilitate public access to and engagement with knowledge creation and dissemination.

Despite the progressive emergence of these technologies and their adoption in academia over the past thirty years or so, comparatively little research has been conducted on how faculty use digital technologies as part of their work. How are technologies taken up or resisted in academic work? What are the broader social, cultural and political implications and contexts of these practices? This volume was designed to address these issues and more. In this introductory chapter to the book, we set out the topics we consider most important to consider when discussing digitised academic work, in order to create a context for the chapters included in our volume.

### Open access publishing and open education

The expansion in the ways in which tertiary education can be offered online has led some academics to envisage the utopian possibilities for 'open education', offering this level of education to anyone with an internet connection and digital device. The introduction of massive open online courses (MOOCs) is one element of this move, but so too are such initiatives as open access publishing of scholarly materials such as research papers, books and syllabi. Digital technologies have facilitated the sharing of academic publications beyond the pay-walled domains of traditional publishing outlets such as journals and books. Many universities now manage their own e-repositories for their staff members to use to deposit material such as theses, conference papers, reports and preprints (pre-reviewed versions) or postprints (authors' accepted versions) of their manuscripts that have been accepted for publication in journals and edited books. Platforms specifically for academics to connect with each other and share their research publications have developed, the most well known of which are currently Academia.edu and ResearchGate.

While the possibilities for 'opening up' tertiary education and academic scholarship accorded with many ideals related to the untrammelling of constraints to

may view open education initiatives as opportunities to reduce financial support for the maintenance of university buildings and the provision of university staff members (Hall, 2013). Thus far, open courseware initiatives have tended to privilege some academic disciplines and well-known academics from high-ranking universities, thus rendering others invisible and reproducing a narrow conceptualisation of what counts as valuable knowledge (Rhoads et al., 2013). Open education may become reduced to simple models of delivering online content to as many people as possible, with little recognition of the funding required to ensure the quality of the learning experience is monitored and upheld. The number of academic teaching positions may be reduced even further as software for assessment and digitally recorded or curated materials stand in for a continuing human presence in the learning experience. As Hall (2013) has observed, the open education movement employs an 'explicit (and often deliberate) fusion of conservative and progressive tendencies and discourses', where such terms as 'hacking the academy' and 'DIY Universities' are accompanied by corporatised visions of efficiency, attracting customers and cost-cutting. Research also suggests, contrary to many of the most optimistic narratives, that students accessing open education initiatives like MOOCs tend to be drawn from the ranks of the privileged groups who already have good tertiary education access, and that completion rates are low (Christensen et al., 2013; Pursel et al., 2016).

The realities of attempting to engage in open education and such methods as 'flipped classrooms' are discussed in two of the chapters in this book. Forsey and Page's discussion outlines the benefits and drawbacks of the flipped classroom from the perspective of both students and lecturers. In many ways, the model of the flipped classroom is attractive in a context in which student attendance at lectures is dwindling in many subjects and the face-to-face lecture as an effective form of teaching has been called into question. They draw attention to the shift in norms, routines and expectations from both sides that is required for this mode of teaching to operate successfully, including a departure from the traditional face-to-face university lecture, in which the lecturer stands at the front of a lecture room or hall and delivers content to a largely passive audience of students by talking for about an hour. Both students and lecturers have to devote significant time and effort to making it work, including adjusting to new ways of doing things. The flipped classroom model does away with this lecture-style of content delivery by sometimes providing recordings of lectures that students can listen to in their own time or removing lectures altogether in favour of small-group activities such as discussions or group tasks involving the active participation of students. Referring tangentially to Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, Forsey and Page emphasise that mundane practices and routines must be changed or adjusted: and like any change in habit or mindset, this takes significant effort. They also point out that a lack of appropriate training and resources for lecturers can impede on the success of models of teaching

call the 'hidden iceberg of academic labour'. Here again, the unrecognised and unsupported costs of adopting this method of teaching are highlighted. As Freund and colleagues point out, the discourses of 'disruption' and 'revolution' focus almost entirely on the possibilities offered by MOOCs for 'opening up' tertiary education. What these techno-utopian discourses fail to recognise is the mitty-gritty of the intense work demanded of academic and university administrative and other support staff in getting these courses up-and-running and providing appropriate support to meet their educational objectives. This involves not only the intellectual labour required of the course convenors to develop its content and assessment strategies, but also the 'articulation work' that underpins teaching activities in universities, including emotional and administrative labour. A large proportion of this labour remains unrecognised and, indeed, not remunerated, so that developing and running a MOOC can often become yet another form of unpaid labour required of the faculty and administrative staff involved. Furthermore, because this type of labour is largely invisible and devoted to supporting students' learning experiences, like other forms of academic support work, it is often under-valued and viewed as 'women's work'. The tendency to draw on the existing 'precarious' labour force of casually employed academic staff and PhD students raises serious ethical questions for university management.

Another feature of open learning and open access initiatives that has provoked disquiet among academics is these initiatives' departure from previous scholarly ideals. As with numerous platforms and technologies originally developed for altruistic purposes as part of knowledge sharing, the building of communities and social networking (Facebook being the most obvious example), some of the software and tools for scholarly research and communication have become progressively commercialised. In alignment with the commodification and corporatisation of higher education more generally over the past twenty years or so, many of these tools and platforms have been taken over by corporate enterprises, including major education and research publishing corporations, such as Pearson and Elsevier.

Critics suggest that platforms that advertise themselves as promoting open access to scholarly research and then seek to monetise academics' willingness to become members are undermining the ethos of open access. They have pointed out that academics are performing unpaid labour for Academia.edu by uploading their details and their scholarly work – as indeed they do for traditional academic journals, whose for-profit model platforms like Academia.edu have directly challenged (for an example of these critiques, see contributions to The Academia.edu Files, published as an open wiki on the Culture Machine Liquid Books platform: [www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/series/liquid-books/](http://www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/series/liquid-books/)). The move by Elsevier to acquire the reference-sharing platform Mendley and the preprint access platform Social Science Research Network provoked many advocates of open access form Social Science Research Network that these sites would progressively lose their

academic and scientific journals (Doctorow, 2016) highlights the knowledge ownership questions at the heart of the open access debate.

Academics like Gary Hall have called for scholarly approaches to open access publishing that are far more radical, moving away from individualism, quantification and a focus on publishers' profit or faculty members' self-promotion and 'personal branding' to a more collaborative and generous approach. Hall has challenged the features he describes as 'the Uberfication of the university' (Hall, 2016) by presenting alternatives: those of 'pirate philosophy' and 'media gifts'. These approaches seek to offer creative ways to facilitate free access to scholarly work, rejecting corporate and neoliberal imperatives and encouraging contributions and collaborations in the spirit of the academic gift economy (see Hall's (2017) website *Media gifts* for many blog posts on these approaches and initiatives like the Culture Machine Liquid Books series and the Open Humanities Press with which he is involved).

In summary, open access platforms hold the potential to change not only the shape of academic work, but its potential audiences and impact. An academic in a cloister is a very different creature from one on a stage. The place we see this shift most clearly is in open access practices. Academics are called on to make decisions in a congested, and often contested, publishing and teaching landscape, usually with very little support for this decision-making process or attention to the broader political and ethical implications of this drive for openness. There is much room for further discussions and interventions that can highlight the tensions and contradictions as well as the potential of scholarly open access initiatives and practices.

### Digital data and academic work

'Big data', or the huge datasets generated by people's interactions with digital technologies, are often presented as creating great possibilities for enhancing social research and contributing to the development of professional practice. This championing of big data is becoming evident in all areas of education, from early learning and school-based to tertiary level (Selwyn, 2014; Grant, 2013). Teachers and academics are also increasingly expected to use digital technologies as part of their teaching practices (Williamson, 2015; Selwyn, 2013). As we noted earlier, faculty members are themselves frequently monitored and measured using digital data-generating tools. Not only their research outputs and impacts but also their teaching practices are assessed and tracked, using such tools as online student surveys and platforms such as Rate My Professors.

In his chapter, Williamson refers to the new phenomenon of 'education data science', bringing together education research with big data analytics. He argues that this research approach originated in higher education institutions and has now spread to other forms of school-based education. The discourse of 'smart schools' is accompanied by that of the 'smart university', a model of tertiary education in which academics are proficient in employing data-

concept of 'fields of power' to explain the ways in which particular types of capital (cultural and social as well as economic) are established and reproduced as part of power relations. For Williamson, educational data science is a field of power and its exponents access these forms of capital as part of its ascendancy in educational domains. He examines the ways in which this emergent field has established itself with certain specific credentials, many of which rest on the broader privileging of big data and learning analytics software as superior modes of knowledge.

Digital data – and particularly large datasets – have acquired a reputation for offering innovative and more insightful knowledges into human behaviour, partly by virtue of being considered more 'neutral' and 'scientific' than other forms of data (Kitchin, 2014; Lupton, 2015; van Dijck, 2014). Further important questions to ask of the use of big data, including in tertiary education, include who has control over and access to these data and how are they used not only for educational purposes but also as profitable materials that are commercialised. As Williamson shows, actors such as the large educational company Pearson use educational digital data to promote their products and introduce new styles of learning and analytics for measuring learning. In the process, they are shaping how learning and teaching are conceptualised and practised. Educational data science as a field of power draws on this reputation and seeks to further establish and extend it, with little critical awareness of the shortcomings and possible threats of using digital data. In his chapter and other writings (Williamson, 2015; Williamson, 2016), Williamson notes that the authority of big data is exerted in an increasing number of areas in education, including the tertiary level.

As scholars working in critical data studies have pointed out, digital data are the products of human decision-making and the affordances of hardware and software. Digital data are no more neutral than any other form of data. Indeed, they are increasingly used politically, in ways that pose challenges to human autonomy and privacy (McCarthy, 2016; Gitelman and Jackson, 2013; Andrejevic, 2013). Digital data are used to establish norms against which people (teachers and academics as well as students) are measured and judged. Digital data are being used to conduct surveillance of people for a wide range of purposes, from commercial to social to managerial, and to make predictive inferences about their behaviours and preferences. Academics are not immune to digital surveillance – for example information on internet service provider (ISP) visits is routinely collected, many libraries use filtering software and profiling technologies are used to monitor 'risky' behaviour, such as the online activity of security and terrorism scholars (Tanczer et al., 2016). Such algorithmic authority can be used to limit or promote people's life opportunities (Lupton, 2015; Crawford and Schultz, 2014).

This move towards digital monitoring and quantification has significant implications for shaping academic work practices and identities. As part of this use of data analytics, academics are encouraged – and indeed, in many cases compelled –

contemporary higher education. Academic workers are subjected to a proliferation of measurements and metrics: from Google Scholar listings of citations for each of their publications to student evaluations of their teaching to national research evaluation exercises, all of which serve to continually formulate 'metric assemblages' of different kinds (Burrows, 2012).

### Social media and blogging

It is perhaps the use of social media that is the most contentious in the world of contemporary academic work. Several studies have identified the usefulness for academics of using social and other digital media for professional purposes. These practices can help faculty to publicise their research, engage in networks with other academics and also with non-academics and keep up to date with others' research (Mewburn and Thomson, 2013; Veletsianos and Kimmons, 2012b; Veletsianos and Kimmons, 2013; Veletsianos and Kimmons, 2012a; Lupton, 2014; Weller, 2011; Carrigan, 2016; Gregg, 2009; Kjellberg, 2010; Kieslinger, 2015). For some academics, the use of social media and tools such as blogs have been important in their social activism efforts (Daniels and Thistlethwaite, 2016). Many of these activities can promote the visibility of an academic's scholarship to diverse publics, both within and outside the academy, and thus assist them in their efforts to be public intellectuals. Self-promotion online can work to provide better employment opportunities and options. Effective use of digital technologies can provide academics with higher levels of visibility that encourage others to read and cite their work (Terras, 2012). Whether or not an academic is looking for a faculty position or promotion, the satisfaction of having one's research read by more people can be its own reward. These benefits need to be put alongside some of the drawbacks which include tensions with academic management responding to the market imperatives in which universities are situated and the perennially thorny issue of academic freedom.

The importance of digital media use for furthering an academic career is further emphasised in several of the chapters in this book. In their chapters, Bonnie Stewart, Narelle Lemon and Megan McPherson write about the academic Twittersphere and its possibilities. In the interviews Inger conducted with Jessie Daniels and Sara Goldrick-Rab, both women highlight how valuable blogging and social media use – particularly Twitter – had been for their engagement as public scholars and political activists. In her interview, Jessie Daniels identifies her approach to communication and scholarship online and describes how she often develops journal articles beginning from tweets or blog posts. Alternatively, she communicates about her published articles and books on Twitter or her blog. Other academics who blog and use social media have also made reference to the opportunities they see in this kind of practice for 'thinking aloud' in public and demonstrating the often mysterious ways in which academic scholarship and writing are conducted (Daniels and Thistlethwaite, 2016; Carrigan, 2016).

processes of traditional academic publishing, but they can demonstrate to less-experienced researchers how the mechanisms of academic writing and research take place. In her chapter, and speaking from the perspective of an early career academic, Charlotte Frost argues for a reconceptualisation of an 'emerging career trajectory that is less publish or perish, than platform and flourish'. She also sees the work performed on the blog she established, PhD2Published, as a form of practice-led research. In developing narratives on the blog of how to publish a book from a doctoral thesis, Frost was able to make the process of research publicly visible as a process.

The ways in which academics communicate with each other and with students and the public are also transformed via the discursive affordances of social media and open access publishing. In her contribution to this volume, Tseen Khoo discusses the importance of the ways in which marginalised scholars (specifically those working in Asian Australian Studies) have used platforms, digital publications and social media to connect with each other, publicise their work and engage in activism. Jessie Daniels describes how she uses Twitter both to conduct informal conversations, but also, as a digital sociologist, to observe how others engage on this medium: 'listening in on conversations' and 'observing people's behaviour – some of it bad behaviour – on Twitter', as she puts it. This engagement allows her to have her say and to see how others formulate their opinions and views. As a scholar of online racism, this insight into online discussions has been valuable for Daniels' research. This is a kind of participant observation research, therefore, where researchers are participating in online discussions at the same time as they are observing them.

Despite these benefits and possibilities, academics have generally been slow to take up social media use for professional purposes and their institutions have taken varying stances in supporting or encouraging them to do so (Roblyer et al., 2010; Daniels and Feagin, 2011; Daniels and Thistlethwaite, 2016; Carrigan, 2016; Kieslinger, 2015). Each of us (editors) could provide many examples of the resistance we have encountered among our colleagues and students in our home countries of Australia and the UK in our efforts to promote social media as a mode of academic work. In her interview, Jessie Daniels observes that even her students (members of the so-called 'digital native' generation) at her New York university lack interest in wanting to learn about how to use blogs and social media to become engaged scholars.

This continued resistance or simply lack of interest among faculty and students flies in the face of institutional initiatives to encourage them to be more active on social media and to use platforms such as blogs to promote their research. Indeed, not all universities are eager and willing to encourage blogging or social media use. Research suggests that employers across occupations harbour some ambivalence about the promotion of these practices. Work organisations can often see social media use by their employees as positive in terms of increasing morale and feelings of



other stakeholders. There is evidence of concern, however, about the legal and policy implications of their employees using social media and the potential for them to waste time using these media or to post content that could be potentially damaging to the professional reputation of the individual and the organisation (El Ouiridi et al., 2015; O'Connor and Schmidt, 2015; O'Connor et al., 2016).

Some workplaces involve specific sensitivities to social and other digital media use by their employees because of professional ethical concerns. Medical associations and medical journals, for example, have warned of the potential ethical issues related to doctors and other healthcare workers using digital media in ways that could potentially flout professional conduct standards, threaten patient confidentiality and challenge the trust relations that are central to the doctor–patient relationship (Chretien and Kind, 2013; Gholami-Kordkheili et al., 2013; Mansfield et al., 2011). Similar concerns about school teachers' use of social media have been expressed. Teachers have lost their jobs because of posting content about themselves or others deemed to be inappropriate by their employers (O'Connor and Schmidt, 2015). In some jurisdictions teachers are banned from becoming friends with their students on social media or giving them access to their profiles (Papandrea, 2012; Asterhan and Rosenberg, 2015). The higher education context involves similar ethical and legal conundrums, related to norms of professional behaviour, the protection of people's privacy and considerations concerning the appropriate manner in which faculty and students should interact with each other on social media. Some universities have instituted policies for staff's use of social media, but many provide little or no guidance to their employees (Jerry and Lidsky, 2012; Carrigan, 2016).

As social media and blogging become more 'normalised', the boundary between a publication and a conversation becomes progressively blurred, with implications for academics that go beyond concerns about finding time or building the right skills to participate in these (constantly) emerging digital spaces. Academics are being encouraged to become performers as well as teachers and researchers – a new kind of academic selfhood, which we will return to later.

### The affective dimensions of digitised academia

For some academics, the use of social media and other forms of online self-promotion can inspire ethical disquiet. Academics are subject to what Gill (2010) has described as 'the hidden injuries of neoliberal academia' caused by increasing pressure on faculty to be ever-more productive while being closely monitored and measured and called to account, all in a context of growing precarious work opportunities (see also Burrows, 2012; Gill, 2014). Such critiques draw attention to the affective aspects of academic labour, including responses to the modes of 'dataveillance' that track the work practices of academics and their impact (for example, their citation rates on Google Scholar or student ratings of their teaching performance).

laptops, smartphones and tablet computers connected to the internet with pervasive Wi-Fi almost everywhere, opportunities to switch off work can be difficult to find (Gregg, 2011). While this may lead to a more flexible work experience, it can mean work is omnipresent. For some critics, exhortations to academics to use digital technologies more actively is yet another instance of the accelerated academy and the move towards 'fast academia', in concert with the progressive commercialisation and marketisation in general of the sphere of academic work (Vostal, 2015; O'Neill et al., 2014). The affordances of these technologies, coupled with expectations about academics' performance and the open-ended nature of academic work (there is always another article to be written), can lead to a constant feeling of guilt and anxiety and the notion that one is never working hard enough (Gill, 2010, 2014).

As Freund and colleagues demonstrate in their chapter, dealing with the pressures of developing and running a MOOC course, as well as the often highly emotional encounters they had with distressed students as part of moderating the course, proved on some occasions to create distress and anxiety. These affective repercussions were part of the unrecognised emotional labour of running a MOOC, the focus of their chapter. As they show, while those involved in the MOOC also experienced the pleasures and emotional satisfactions of being involved in a pioneering way of offering education, these were coupled with significant stressors. Freund and colleagues draw attention to the sometimes difficult-to-manage tensions between 'fun' and 'work' in such situations, highlighting the point that as highly educated, reflexive workers, academics can often feel very ambivalent about the use of such digital tools. Academics are aware of their exploitation but often desire the benefits that the tools offer them or those they are teaching. These tensions can be exacerbated when working on short-term (or even non-existent) contracts where the academic does not necessarily have the agency or tools to challenge the conditions under which they are expected to work.

One of the most popular academic Twitter accounts is 'Shit Academics Say' (with over 226,000 followers at the time of writing – there are also Facebook and Tumblr accounts). In highlighting the omnipresence of academic work (and particularly, the imperative to write prodigiously), the Canadian academic behind this account, Nathan Hall, constantly riffs on the 'I should be writing' theme. Recent examples (all tweeted in November 2016) include:

How not to work on the weekend: 1. define work and weekend as restrictive social constructs. 2. feel sad

What doesn't kill you makes you profoundly resent your inability to say no

How to be productive when working from home: 1. Don't nap 2. Don't nap 3. Don't nap 4. Just one quick nap then it's back to writing I promise

demonstrates the value of this kind of humour for faculty who are facing the same kinds of challenges and pressures to be productive in the accelerated academy. Indeed, as Hall puts it himself in one of his tweets: 'It's not Twitter procrastination. It's knowledge mobilization 2.0.' One could also add that it is emotional support that is the key value of the material disseminated on this account and interactions shared on it between followers. In an interview (Wagman, 2015), Hall explained that his key motivation, in fact, was to have an outlet for his own frustrations and anxieties:

there had been a lot of anxiety for me getting ready for tenure. At the time I was feeling fairly burnt out and disillusioned and I actually wanted to see if people felt the same way I did. What I realized is that people online, on Twitter and other social media, were engaged in sharing things more widely, talking more candidly about issues. I felt like I was missing out.

Hall went on to describe the importance of academics having a space where they could discuss their failures and relieve the sense of isolation that many often feel. Hall's sarcasm hides an often biting critique of the high work levels and precarious employment many faculty members are experiencing. Mewburn and Thomson (2013) note that the 'virtual staffroom' function of social media goes beyond the individual, it also allows political critique and mobilisation, as well as expressions of collegial solidarity.

Another cause for concern is the vulnerability that greater visibility can bring with it. Online sites, and particularly some social media platforms, have become notorious for offering opportunities for users to engage in 'flaming' or 'trolling' behaviours, involving making abusive and even threatening comments about and to other users. Academics who use online media for professional purposes can find themselves the target of such abuse. This is particularly the case if they are members of marginalised or less powerful social groups, including women, people who identify as non-heterosexual or cisgendered, and non-whites, or for those whose online comments and writing involve discussion of politically contentious issues. Some academics have been publicly shamed for making controversial statements online, and have even lost their jobs as a result (Carrigan, 2016).

In this volume, Jessie Daniels provides her own experiences of being attacked on Twitter by racist and white supremacist groups because of her discussion of her work on racism and hate speech. She has been verbally attacked not only because of her opinions but also on the basis of her sexuality and physical appearance. In her interview, Sara Goldrick-Rab also recounts her frustration that googling her name results in search returns providing incorrect information about a tweet in which she made a political comment about an American politician. Despite her prolific tweeting on all manner of subjects, this sole tweet eventually created a high level of controversy and led to Goldrick-Rab being sanctioned by the faculty senate of her

remain committed to their online scholarly practices. Indeed, both emphasise that they see their social media use as essential to their work as academics working hard for social activist causes. Mewburn and Thomson's chapter on doctoral bloggers also shows that several of them were aware of the potential risks of engaging in blogging; but here again, the benefits they received from this practice outweighed any drawbacks.

Many faculty members have either experienced hostile behaviours or witnessed them in their online encounters, and have come to be wary of engaging professionally in social and other digital media for this reason, as Deborah found in her survey of academics who use digital media for their work (Lupton, 2014). When her respondents were asked to comment in an open-ended question about any concerns or worries they may have about their engagement online, many mentioned their fear that their ideas may appear 'half-baked' or that they may say something that would prove contentious and expose them to disciplinary action or the possibility of losing their job or promotion opportunities. The issue of finding the time to use digital media in a work context in which there are many demands on people was also raised by many respondents, as were the difficulties of working out the right tone when communicating on social media. This finding was corroborated in the chapter by Mewburn and Thomson in this volume and was also an issue raised by Marshall and colleagues in reporting the findings of their study into academics' use of digital media. Furthermore, faculty members are often concerned about how to appropriately maintain the boundaries between private and professional content (see also Kieslinger, 2015).

Given that academics are working in a precarious job market, such fears are well founded. Daniels (this volume) advises that junior academics consider the political context of their own institution, including how supportive of social media use those in positions of power are, when deciding how to engage online. She further advises that faculty members of any level of seniority challenge social media guidelines developed by their universities if they appear to be overly restrictive or punitive. Both Khoo and Daniels suggest that universities need to support publicly engaged scholars in situations when they are opening themselves up to vituperation online, particularly those from marginalised social groups.

### The performance of academic selfhood

Another important dimension of understanding digital academia relates to issues of professional identities and selfhood. Any form of digital engagement involves the performance of selfhood, including professional selfhood (van Dijk, 2013). When academics use social and other digital media for professional purposes, they are called upon to make decisions about how best to represent themselves, including what platform to use and how to use it. These decisions may involve such features

and what images they choose as portraits, as well as the content they go on to contribute and the engagements they have with other users.

These considerations are particularly brought to the fore in the chapter by Marshall and colleagues on academic persona online. They are also addressed in Mewburn and Thomson's contribution on the use of blogging in the formation of academic selfhood by doctoral researchers and Stewart's chapter on Twitter 'orality'. In their chapter, Marshall and colleagues draw on their previous work on the ways in which certain types of personae are configured via online practices. Drawing on Goffman's work on the performance of selfhood, they use the term 'persona' to describe a strategically developed public identity. The use of platforms like social media and practices such as blogging and open access publishing, they contend, are important contributors to academic personae. Marshall and colleagues contend that a range of digital identity-shaping and defining metrics and content work together to configure academic personae: from automatically generated data from such tools as Google Scholar and journal article views, download and citation statistics (which are now standard for all academics) to their more voluntarily created representations of their scholarly work, such as social media posts, podcasts, YouTube videos and contributions to platforms like Academia.edu.

Engaging online for professional purposes also requires developing new styles of communication that can differ quite markedly from the norms of scholarly discourse. In her chapter, Bonnie Stewart describes Twitter as engendering a 'scholarly public' in which oral and literary traditions are challenged and, in her words, 'collapsed', intersecting to create a new space and format of academic communication. The informality and brevity of the Twitter format is directly counter to the formal language conventions of academia. Academics who choose to take up the use of Twitter or other social media, or writing blogs, often need to learn these conventions, including not only how to write, but what the content of the writing should be, how to share this writing and who else to follow and engage with. The skills, knowledge and time required to establish and maintain online profiles for sites like Academia.edu are further emphasised by Marshall and colleagues in their chapter.

As Mewburn and Thomson's study of doctoral researchers who blog found, this practice can be important to various practices of academic selfhood. Drawing on Foucauldian concepts of ethical self-formation and applying these to engagement online, Mewburn and Thomson demonstrate that, for these students, blogging can be a way of discovering how to be an academic researcher. The doctoral students in their study found blogging worked to help them reflect on their research, practise writing and the expression of their ideas as they were formulated and learn to communicate as a researcher working in an academic context. They position academic blogging as a hybrid form of writing, involving both note-taking and correspondence, inviting responses from others. Indeed, in contradiction to arguments that practices like blogging and using social media may contribute to the pressures of the accelerated academy many of the participants noted that for them blog-

demand of them. Here again, the pleasure, sense of achievement, agency, connection with others and self-fulfilment that this type of academic writing can engender were highlighted in their participants' accounts of why they blog. Marshall and colleagues also reported a high level of satisfaction from the participants who were experimenting with using social media, YouTube and more academically specific platforms. Their participants reported such benefits as attracting postgraduate students, better engagement with current undergraduate students, drawing more attention to their research publications and speaking invitations ensuing from their labour of contributing online content.

Nonetheless, for many academics the very concept of 'self-branding', a term which is sometimes used to describe an important purpose of using online media to configure an academic profile, is viewed as highly questionable and unnecessary. The 'branding' notion fits uncomfortably with broader anxieties about cultures of narcissism (particularly as expressed on social media), audit culture and the neo-liberal imperative to engage in self-improvement and self-promotion. Increased public visibility is not always viewed as positive and, as we noted earlier, can have serious repercussions if things go wrong. For some academics, incitements to use digital tools like social media to promote themselves and their research is anathema to their concepts of appropriate professional deportment. Despite increasing pressures on the part of funding bodies, government policies and their own institutions to encourage academics to engage with publics and demonstrate 'impact' outside the university, some faculty are challenged by an unwritten norm that academics should not be seen to be self-promoting or allowing themselves to 'dumb-down' their serious scholarly work in attempts to reach a public forum.

It is here that the words of the anonymous social media critic with which we opened this Introduction are echoed: to be an academic Instagram, Facebook or Twitter user is to be a 'non-serious' academic who is prioritising self-promotion or the utterance of banalities over appropriate academic discourse and communication. This belief is noted in several chapters in this volume (including those by Lemon and McPherson, Mewburn and Thomson, and Stewart). As Daniels comments in this volume, academics are still not rewarded for the knowledge production and dissemination that takes place in digital media. Despite the fact that almetrics can demonstrate the often significant reach that digitally engaged scholars can achieve, other measures of academic worth and standing are still privileged (Kieslinger, 2015).

## Conclusion

If there is one key finding of the research we have here discussed, including the contributions to this volume, it is that there is no escaping the digital – no outside to which we can retreat. As in any other sphere of life in many countries, there are no distinctions now between being 'online' and 'offline'. The nature of the aca-

realm of higher education are fraught with complexities and ambivalences. The authors of the chapters included here have gone some way to providing nuanced accounts of the complexities and ambivalences in what is a fast-changing work environment. Their contributions include theoretical argument, empirical research and critical self-reflection, as well as two interviews outlining personal experiences of working as an academic in the digitised workplace.

Taken together, a complex, even contradictory picture of digital academic practice is emerging. While each of the contributors would be the first to suggest that their view is partial and incomplete, taken together, the chapters in the book are a persuasive 'take' on the actual lived experiences of the digital academy. As such, the book stands, we suggest, as a marker of and in a particular time in university history – a time when decisions about the ownership and control of knowledge production and the working conditions of academics may change values and practices for better or worse. This book is intended as a contribution to that discussion that can help transcend some of the unhelpful narratives that have circulated about academics who engage with digital practices. We want to move beyond the stale binary of 'good' social media engagement that supports a neoliberal agenda of expansion and growth and its shadow, where social media is facile, banal and a waste of time for the 'serious' academic. We hope that you read the book, adding your own experiences to those that are elaborated here – and, of course, communicating them to us on social media!

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