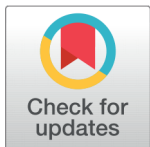


## REVIEW ARTICLE



## Rejuvenation of online research interactive fora during COVID-19

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## Abstract

**Objective:** To analyse the usefulness of various interactive fora in sharing the scientific updates among researchers. **Methodology:** Popular research fora viz. ResearchGate, Academia, Mendeley, Kudos and Publons were considered. A bird's eye view on emerging benefits of such fora and their dependability are critically analysed using secondary data. It includes published articles and records. **Findings:** The analysis shows that these interactive fora help in breaking the geographical, economical and institutional barriers and are able to offer sharing of research knowledge among peer groups. However, these online fora also have their own demerits on reliability of the research interactive outcome. Our analysis clearly shows that if these bottlenecks are removed, the interactive fora can bring paradigm shifts in global research output to the next level. **Novelty:** With this effect, the authors not only identified the problems cropping in the existing research interactive fora but also put forward an improved interactive platform "Scholarly Needs" by which the motivated research scholars can be identified for their original contribution, ranked and showcased for their talent.

**Keywords:** Research forum; Scholarly Needs; ResearchGate; Academia; Mendeley; Publons; Kudos

## 1 Introduction

In the recent times, research scholars spend more time online rather than offline for upgrading their knowledge and find solution to their research problems. The number of people and the time spent on online fora increases logarithmically due to digital advancements and online repositories<sup>(1-6)</sup>. The COVID-19 situation has also reinforced the need for online research interaction. More people sign-up to enroll in research fora and find them very useful.

Earlier, the research fora were used for mere idea exchange. Nowadays, as their use and demands are growing, the scholars' expectation from such fora for comprehensive quality assessment on research outcome and contributors' stand in the research field is imperative.

Section 2 describes the methodology used for the analyses of these fora. Section 3 briefly provides in-depth analysis of the fora. Finally, the work is summarized and

concluded in Section 4.

## 2 Methodology

Interactive fora such as ResearchGate, Academia, Publons, Mendeley, Kudos and Scholarly Needs were taken for analysis. The published sources on the interactive fora were considered for analysis. This includes review articles and also published records.

## 3 Results and Discussion

The detailed presentation of every research forum is explained along with merits and demerits.

### 3.1 ResearchGate

The primary focal point of ResearchGate (RG) is to share and find research articles among peer groups. Preprints, project proposals and raw data can also be shared in RG. It offers an exclusive individual messaging window for users. One can ask questions and respond to the queries<sup>(7)</sup>. RG is useful in connecting with diverse researchers in one's field. It allows users to request for a full text of articles, provides the unique RG score for ranking the active users<sup>(8)</sup> and helps in searching for job preferences. Finally, it provides statistics for every user, which covers the citations, recommendations, and most read publications of a particular user. RG also presents its impact factor for journals. To mention RG's drawbacks, the journals having fake impact factor are also treated in par with those reputed journals carrying "Journal Impact Factor"<sup>(9)</sup>. Values of publication reads can be manipulated by users<sup>(10)</sup>. The RG score has not been widely accepted as a research metric by many researchers due to its questionable credibility<sup>(11)</sup>.

### 3.2 Academia

The foremost usage of Academia is for posting new articles, statistics of research work and ranking amongst peer groups<sup>(12)</sup>. It helps in showcasing various metrics such as who visited the user's profile, number of views of an article<sup>(7)</sup>. It allows the user to upload his/her own copy of research work, which helps in promoting the open access of articles (free and widespread usage of published works). It notifies the users whenever a new article related to a user's research interest is posted on Academia<sup>(12)</sup>. Even though Academia has many benefits, it lacks the following: many preprints in academia may not be peer reviewed, which can hamper the research quality. Some of the basic data like list of article readers and mentions are priced by Academia. Even now, there is a hesitancy of using Academia for faculty recruitment and promotion<sup>(12)</sup>.

### 3.3 Mendeley

The primary need for Mendeley is for managing and storing valuable research data<sup>(13)</sup>. It is a web-based platform developed by Elsevier, which helps in sharing research works and finding out the recent research from around the world<sup>(8)</sup>. It acts as a data repository and citation manager. Mendeley also helps in importing citations from Google Scholar. Finally, it provides Digital Object Identifier (DOI), a unique ID, for deposited data but it does not hold the copyright of the data stored<sup>(14)</sup>. Mendeley also has its own issues, it does not guarantee a user for error tolerant output of references<sup>(15)</sup>.

### 3.4 Kudos

Kudos was primarily developed to enhance the reach and visibility of published research works. They are useful in measuring and evaluating the scholar's performance<sup>(16)</sup>. The Kudos provides an ease of access to the published articles. It also helps in showcasing various metrics like views of articles, full text downloads, Altmetric score and citation<sup>(17)</sup>. It does not store the published articles in its database, rather it provides an overview of the published work. One of the major loopholes in Kudos is the inability to search for an author using their name. Data obtained from Altmetrics may get delayed as it involves third party access<sup>(17)</sup>.

### 3.5 Publons

Publons is basically used for saving and sharing peer review records. Endorsement of other members' records is an interesting feature in Publons which improves the overall score of that particular user<sup>(18)</sup>. Publons has a free peer review training course (Publons Academy) which helps the user get practical experience on the peer reviewing process with one-to-one assistance

from a mentor. Publons suffer from weakness i.e., some peer reviews are not legit and this makes the peers exploit Publons for getting recognition<sup>(19)</sup>.

### 3.6 Scholarly Needs

The Scholarly Needs (SN), an emerging platform, was primarily developed for interaction among research scholars and ranking them based on their research metrics<sup>(20)</sup>. SN facilitates sharing of published research works and at the same time helps the original authors/co-authors to post and claim their articles. Its salient features also include job and internship search which are posted on SN database. A question-and-answer portal is available within SN for solving the research queries of the users. SN also provides the user with an option of writing reviews for the unpublished articles, which helps the user in improving their peer reviewing skills. SN encourages scholars to propose project ideas that can be shared with the interested industrial demands. Industries can also post their real-time problems and seek solutions from the scholars. SN also houses 'Real-time' access to the academic achievements (*résumé*) of the scholarly members. A digital badge is embedded along with the CV, reflecting the research metrics of individual scholars.

## 4 Conclusion

Interactive fora certainly provide an avenue for the young researchers to make online interaction with peer groups and it is a great boon in COVID-19 pandemic situation. Most researchers preferred ResearchGate, as it enhances sharing of published works among users and facilitates their interaction with fellow researchers. Academia is also equally preferred by users as they help in wide reachability of articles. Yet there are some gaps in the present fora. As people move towards a digital oriented world, many features are required for enhancement of these research interactive fora and protecting the legitimacy of user's data. There is a promising future for interactive fora as truly motivated researchers will enroll and reap the benefits out of them. So, the authors have come up with a solution, plugging such gaps out of the existing fora and evolved a new interactive forum (Scholarly Needs). With this forum, the scholars can harvest research interactive benefits in a better way.

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