

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF HOW SOCIAL MEDIA SERVES FOR RESEARCH VISIBILITY AND ALTMETRIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG SRI LANKAN ACADEMICS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Altmetrics (alternative metrics) have emerged as an extension of traditional research impact indicators by capturing online attention generated primarily through social media and digital platforms. Unlike citation-based metrics, altmetrics reflect immediate engagement with research outputs through platforms such as academic networking sites and social media channels. While global higher education institutions increasingly integrate altmetrics into research evaluation, empirical evidence on how Sri Lankan academics utilize social media driven altmetric mechanisms to enhance research visibility remains limited.

Objective: This study aims to examine how social media-enabled altmetric mechanisms contribute to research visibility among Sri Lankan academics, with specific attention to practices that enhance online engagement and visibility outcomes rather than perceptions alone.

Methodology: A qualitative research design was adopted, involving semi-structured interviews with 33 academics and three focus group discussions conducted at the Open University of Sri Lanka, University of Jaffna, and University of Vavuniya. Participants were purposively selected based on prior experience in disseminating research through academic social networking platforms and social media channels, ensuring relevance to altmetric-related visibility outcomes. Data were analysed using thematic analysis supported by systematic coding, with themes refined until thematic saturation was achieved.

Results and Findings: The findings demonstrate that research visibility was enhanced primarily through platform-driven engagement mechanisms associated with altmetrics, particularly via ResearchGate, LinkedIn and Google Scholar profile sharing. Academics who actively shared publications experienced increased article views, downloads, professional inquiries and collaboration requests key indicators of

altmetric attention. However, visibility outcomes were uneven due to inconsistent social media engagement practices and limited institutional facilitation. General-purpose platforms such as Facebook were perceived as less effective for scholarly dissemination, while the absence of institutional strategies for tracking and leveraging altmetric data constrained systematic impact enhancement.

Conclusion/Implications: This study reveals that altmetric driven research visibility among Sri Lankan academics is largely incidental rather than strategic. Universities can operationalize these findings by formalizing social media dissemination strategies, incorporating altmetric indicators into research performance frameworks, and providing targeted training on platform specific engagement for research visibility. These actions can transform altmetrics from passive indicators into active tools for academic impact.

Keywords: *Altmetric Indicators, Research Visibility Outcomes, Academic Social Networking Platforms, Digital Research Dissemination, Sri Lankan Higher Education*