

**RESEARCH TITLE**

# Trends in digital scholarship curation in public and private higher education in southern Africa: a socio-technical approach towards sustainability

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**ABSTRACT**

Globally, recent research indicates that valuable research output originates from both public and private higher education institutions (HEIs), but the results of scholarship are often not archived and curated sustainably. Universities and HEIs are knowledge-intensive environments. Research and scholarship created are institutional knowledge capital and must be managed as assets to give the institution a competitive edge in research and academic stature. The status and prestige of HEIs depend on the quality, visibility and accessibility of their research. Knowledge capital must therefore be managed in a way that will ensure return on investment (ROI).

Scholarship that is available in an HEI's dissertations, theses, proceedings and publications forms part of the institutional knowledge capital. Digitised institutional repositories (IRs) are the preferred method of showcasing scholarship on the internet, adding to the HEI's web visibility. IRs have developed over the past 20 years to become sophisticated networked digital research collections.

Research-intensive universities and institutions reap benefits from showcasing scholarship digitally in well-developed IRs, as well as in peer-reviewed academic journals. HEIs with well-developed and well-maintained IRs rank consistently higher on webometrics ranking sites. All HEI sectors have not benefited equally from IR developments, and many African HEIs still do not perform according to world trends observed on ranking sites such as the Registry of Open Access Repositories and OpenDOAR.

Despite rapid growth and developments in digital scholarship curation, some private and public HEIs are lagging behind. Private HEIs in Southern Africa are still not visible and readily accessible on the web. Southern African private HEIs rank significantly lower than their comparative public HEIs. Poor scholarship curation and lack of research visibility deter HEIs from taking their rightful place in higher education and higher education research communities. Where research collections are not managed sustainably as knowledge capital, full ROI will not be possible.

Recently IR research has changed focus, from an initial information management and information technology approach, when questions on the role of the human element in the process of scholarship curation came to the fore. Knowledge management (KM) principles such as scholarship as knowledge capital, the value of research and scholarship became topics of recent research. Although HEIs are generally slow in implementing KM, the value of KM as an institutional strategy is increasingly being realised by global trendsetting HEIs.

The sustainability of IRs poses challenges in HEIs where the research culture is still not fully developed and the importance of sustainable scholarship collections is not realised. The benefits and value of research for the HEI, the researcher and research knowledge society are not optimised, and may often not be supported by the HEI's research strategies, policies, planning, archiving and curation procedures.

This study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods, and includes quantitative webometric analysis, qualitative content analysis of IRs registered on the IR directory OpenDOAR, and data collected from the survey questionnaire by asking both qualitative and quantitative questions.

Target groups were identified from Namibia, South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Trends in the target group were compared with global IR trends to identify possible sustainability risk factors. The study aimed to get answers as to why access to digital scholarship appears to be restricted, the reasons for the lack of IR web visibility, and the low ranking or no ranking of IRs in the target group. Results from empirical research questionnaires were triangulated with webometric analysis to derive solutions and best practices and to ensure sustainable scholarship curation in IRs. A socio-technical model for sustainable scholarship curation is offered, to identify the IR sustainability domain in relation to the relevant institutional levels impacting on research and research curation.

This study offers a comprehensive definition of the sustainability domain for scholarship curation in IRs. It comprises a list of sustainability threats that must be avoided, and that should be seen as risk indicators present on a governance, infrastructural, and institutional cultural level.

**Keywords:** research visibility, digital scholarship curation, open access repositories, sustainability risks

The full thesis can be found at <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/63181>