From Citations to Clicks

https://www.e-ir.info/2014/11/11/from-citations-to-clicks/

DYLAN KISSANE, NOV 11 2014

I was in the Czech Republic last week for the 6th Prague Conference in Asian Studies hosted by the Metropolitan University of Prague (MUP). This conference brought together scholars from across Europe and, indeed, the world, my own panel consisting of researchers from Finland, Japan, the Czech Republic, and myself from France. It was a wonderful event and I left with some useful and constructive criticism of my own ideas, some ideas and concepts from others to research in more detail, and a bunch of new contacts in IR that I hope I will meet again soon.

As well as playing the perfect host for the conference, MUP is also the headquarters of the *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* (CEJISS). The CEJISS is a young journal but it is already developing a good reputation for quality. I have published a couple of e-contributions for the journal over the last year and I've reviewed a couple of books for the printed version of the journal too. I wanted to take advantage of being in Prague to meet with some of the team behind the journal and so, when Daniela Zordová suggested meeting for a drink, I straight away agreed.

Three members of the CEJISS team met me after the final session of the first day of the conference. Daniela, the journal's Public Relations officer, was accompanied by Anja Grabovac, the journal's Research Manager, and David Erkomaishvili, the Deputy Editor of the journal, and we quickly got out of the cold and into a warm, off-campus cafe.

After a round of introductions our conversation quickly turned to the business of managing a journal, in particular a young, open access publication like CEJISS. I have a little experience in this field having long been involved in various roles (author, reviewer, and editorial board) at the Central European University's *Political Science Journal* and before that with *Politikon*, the journal of the International Association for Political Science Students. We shared stories, compared experiences, and found that – unsurprisingly – we had a lot in common.

As at all good journals there are the challenges related to managing submissions, organizing the peer review, deciding on special issues or themed issues, and corresponding with authors and potential authors. The printing and layout process can be particularly difficult, at least before good systems are in place, and distribution of the journal in both print and online form is a logistical challenge with each channel – the website, libraries, electronic databases – having their own requirements and formatting demands.

These sorts of issues, though, are not so different to the challenges faced by journals throughout history. Yet when the conversation moved to communication and promotion of the work of the journal I began to realize just how different the contemporary academic context is to that of just a few years ago.

Our conversation saw us referencing click-through rates, discussing the advantages of the CEJISS's Drupal-based platform compared to my preference for a WordPress platform, the importance of Facebook and Twitter for promoting e-contributions in the periods between the quarterly publication of the journal, and the need to optimize pages for discovery by search engines, especially Google.

We discussed different approaches to managing academic Twitter accounts – the CEJISS opens their to the entire editorial board resulting in a range of voices while other journals often assign their account to a single member of the team to manage – and discussed the problems that can emerge if academics are invited to blog for the journal. On

From Citations to Clicks

Written by Dylan Kissane

this last point, the most consistent problem seemed to be the problems of managing comments on blog posts, particularly on controversial political posts.

For a journal like CEJISS that is committed to open access and free discussion of ideas there is an obvious disinclination to censor comments on blog posts, but neither do they want the comments sections of their site descending into off-topic argument. We discussed various options to overcome this problem with comments including refusing all comments (on my personal site this is what I've done), using a comments management system, moderating comments with a team of part-time volunteers, and moving the opportunity to comment to a Facebook page where anonymous commenting – often the most aggressive and off-topic – is impossible (this is the approach adopted by the CEJISS).

Our discussion was wide ranging and thoroughly enjoyable, but it was only after I left that I realized just how different the communication channels we were discussing are today as compared to just a few years ago. Journals used to rely on simply quality and perhaps a booth at the annual ISA or APSA meeting to promote their wares. Today journals have public relations managers, use social media to reach out to potential authors and especially to potential readers, and seek to add value through online interactions and author blogs.

Established publications like the *International Studies Quarterly* have recognised this need to change their communication with readers and potential readers and their site now features regular 'link round ups', featured posts, and a Twitter feed.

In a similar way, *International Security*'s homepage is no longer the bland, standard MIT Press page it once was. It now offers readers the opportunity to like the journal on Facebook, follow the journal on Twitter, and is producing regular 'batches' – short e-books consisting of *International Security* articles on a particular theme – and even podcasts.

Contemporary journals are reaching out to their readers in a myriad of different ways not because they want to, but because they have to. In a noisy world journals and even individual academics need to find a way to be heard and the CEJISS, *International Studies Quarterly*, and *International Security* are communicating with readers, potential readers, and authors in new and exciting ways, and the academics who manage these journals are having to become familiar with communication channels that ten years ago did not exist.

All of which means that, once again, the skill set that a modern academic needs to maintain to succeed is changing. Along with a doctorate, the ability to win research grants, and a couple of peer-reviewed articles in the works, a young professor will need to be able to demonstrate the ability to engage successfully with others on social media, to optimize their article titles for search engines, to develop (in the words of Seth Godin) a 'tribe' of readers, and to maintain enthusiasm for their work in the periods between publications.

There's an impression out there that the world of the academic is a cloistered one, removed from the real world, and independent of the pressures of competition, marketing, and profit. That impression is wrong and proving more so every day.

Sincere thanks to Alica Kizeková, Maria Straskova and David Kozisek at MUP for the wonderful conference, and to Daniela, Anja, and David at the CEJISS *for their warm welcome and precious time.*

About the author:

Dylan Kissane is Professor of International Politics at CEFAM in Lyon, France. He is the curator of The Ivory Tower blog on E-IR.

From Citations to Clicks
Written by Dylan Kissane