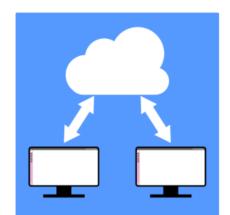# Academia is a reputation economy — data-sharing policies should take incentives into account.

Data sharing has the potential to facilitate wider collaboration and foster scientific progress. But while 88% of researchers in a recent study confirmed they would like to use shared data, only 13% had actually made their own data publicly available. **Benedikt Fecher**, **Sascha Friesike**, **Marcel Hebing**, **Stephanie Linek**, *and* **Armin Sauermann** *look at the mismatch between ideal and reality and argue that academia is a reputation economy, an exchange system that is not driven by monetary incentives, nor the desire for scientific progress, but by individual reputation. Data sharing will only be widely adopted among research professionals if it pays in the form of reputation.*

In autumn 2014, we conducted a survey on academic data sharing among 1564 researchers in Germany, a follow-up study on our paper "What Drives Academic Data Sharing?". In the survey, we asked researchers about their handling of research data, their publication culture, and particularly what keeps them from making data available to other researchers.

One has to know that reusing data is often regarded as the next big thing in academic research. It encourages collaboration and allows researchers to find synergies in the laborious task of collecting data. Moreover, it makes research results reproducible and allows the reuse of "old" datasets for new research questions. By and large it has the potential to foster scientific progress. And it is therefore not surprising that funding agencies, academic journals, policy makers, and researchers themselves increasingly demand it. With regards to academic data sharing, Neelie Kroes, the European Commissioner for the Digital Agenda, said: "Open access to research results will boost Europe's innovation capacity".

To some extent however, open access to research data resembles the electric car that everyone likes in theory but nobody drives. In our survey, only 13% of the researchers have made data available publicly. 37% of the respondents said that it is uncommon to share data in their community. At the same time, 88% would like to use shared data for their own research. The results bring out quite clearly the mismatch between the aspirations and the empirical reality. The bitter truth about open access to research data is that everyone likes the idea but not many follow it through.

Last week, we published the first article based on the results of our survey. Our main argument is that academia is a reputation economy, an exchange system that is not driven by monetary incentives, nor the desire for scientific progress, but by individual reputation. Reputation is expressed in (high ranked journal) publications whereas sharing data receives not enough formal recognition. In our view, data sharing will only be widely adopted among research professionals if it pays in the form of reputation. Policy measures that intend to foster research collaboration need to understand this aspect of academia. Successful measures must ascribe more value to intermediate products, such as research data, than it is the case now.

The article can be found on SSRN here. The questionnaire can be found on our Github Page here.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our Comments Policy if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the Authors

Benedikt Fecher of the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin), is a doctoral researcher at the Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society. The focus of his dissertation is the participation in Open Science Projects.

Dr. Sascha Friesike is a Postdoc at the Humboldt Insitute for Internet and Society in the research area internet-enabled innovation. He holds a PhD in Technology and Innovation Management from the University of St. Gallen. Before he studied engineering economics at the TU Berlin.

Marcel Hebing works at the research data centre of the German Institute for Economic Research in Berlin. (http://www.diw.de/sixcms/detail.php?id=diw_01.c.367882.de&sprache=de)

Stephanie Linek is a researcher at the German National Library of Economics in Kiel, specializing on Science 2.0 and media psychology (http://zbw.eu/en/about-us/key-activities/usability/stephanie-linek/)

Armin Sauermann is a research assistant for Open Science at the Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society in Berlin

March 13th, 2015 | Academic communication, Academic Publishing, Higher Education, Open