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Kudos: bringing your publications to life?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to provide an overview and evaluation of Kudos, a web-based platform that aims to increase the visibility, reach, and impact of published scholarly works.

Design/methodology/approach – The review chronicles the rise of Kudos and describes the platform's functionalities and use capabilities.

Findings – The findings detail the strengths and limitations of Kudos and point toward avenues for continued research and development.

Originality/value – This is the first review to provide a substantive evaluation of Kudos for academics to consider when adopting, utilizing and researching the platform.

Keywords Scholarly communication, Research impact, Academic networks, Digital publishing platforms, Public dissemination of research, Web-based library resources

Paper type Viewpoint

The birth of Kudos: a historical overview

Kudos (<https://growkudos.com>) is a web-based service that aims to increase the visibility, reach and impact of published scholarly works. The idea for the company was born in 2012 by Melinda Kenneway, Charlie Rapple, and David Sommer as a solution to the many challenges facing both the producers and consumers of academic research. The founders argue that Kudos fills a void in academic publishing by addressing the following concerns:

- the difficulties for consumers of academic research in navigating the growing wealth of scholarly literature;
- the burdens on researchers in tracking what happens with their research after it is published;
- the increasing prevalence of digital impact measures and altmetrics, which are often misunderstood and underutilized;
- the turn of researchers and academic institutions toward impact measures that assess and evaluate scholars' performance;
- the evolution of new platforms for distribution and circulation of research that are expanding in digital media environments; and
- the pressure publishers are experiencing to compete with one another to provide authors with services required to meet their needs (van Korlaar, 2014).

Prior to the launch of Kudos, an initial pilot phase of website testing was conducted, which involved a survey of 3,500 authors from three publishers (*AIP Publishing*, *The Royal Society of Chemistry* and *Taylor & Francis*). Twenty-one questions about subject disciplines, career



stages and geographic locations were asked. Results found that 84 per cent of the respondents thought that more could be done to raise visibility, impact and usage of their work; 80 per cent of authors felt that it was their personal responsibility to increase the levels of impact, usage and visibility of their work; and over 75 per cent of respondents said they would be quite likely, likely, or very likely to use Kudos for this purpose (Smith, 2013). From these results, the founders concluded that Kudos could fulfill an unmet demand in the academic marketplace.

Alpha testing of the website was conducted from September 2013 to December 2013 with the partnership of the three publishers employed during the pilot phase. In total, 150,000 articles were uploaded and divided into control and test groups. The test groups were invited to join and use Kudos. A thousand authors registered in the first 24 hours, and 5,500 authors registered by the end of the 14-week period. Articles shared through Kudos received 19 per cent higher article usage per day. Beta testing was then conducted from April 2014 to December 2014, after which a full-scale public launch occurred.

Growing Kudos: functionalities and use capabilities

Kudos serves four distinct communities:

- (1) researchers and authors who produce scholarly articles;
- (2) academic institutions that these researchers are affiliated with;
- (3) publishers who disseminate academic publications; and
- (4) general publics, including newsmakers, reporters and journalists, as well as students and consumers of social media.

Kudos, in its current form, serves as an intermediary among these distinct communities that attempts to fulfill the needs of each. For researchers, Kudos provides a vehicle through which they can simplify, contextualize, interpret and make their work accessible to wider audiences. Through this process of contextualization and simplification, researchers lessen the likelihood of lay publics misunderstanding their research findings, while increasing the likelihood that their research findings will receive attention from established media outlets and shares via social media. By publicizing their work, researchers have the opportunity to increase both the impact and notoriety of their efforts.

Academic institutions benefit greatly from the publication of researchers' scholarship. As researchers' studies proliferate to larger audiences, gain greater impact, and accrue a wider reach, the reputation of affiliated universities are also enhanced, which can, in turn, result in strengthened reputational prestige and the attraction of more grant funding. Publishers, when provided with the tailored article profiles developed by researchers using Kudos, have the means to bring in new reader requests for access to the complete studies housed behind their paywalls, which, in turn, results in increased revenues for the publishers. As a final stakeholder, the public now has a means to more easily read, understand, share, and discuss research through various channels, including social media, like Facebook and Twitter.

There are currently two methods of joining Kudos. The first method involves researchers' adoption of the website, whereby individual scholars create personal accounts and utilize the website to develop their own profiles. This method of access and membership does not have a direct monetary cost to individual researchers. The second method of joining Kudos involves partnerships between academic institutions and publishers who pay a fee to subscribe to the website.

At this time, Kudos has 71 publishers, 7 institutions that are participating in the institutional pilot and over 100,000 users. Kudos encourages authors to use common

language and to incorporate supplemental links to explain their articles in a manner that is easy to understand, to share their articles through social media and email, and to access metrics that assess the impact of their articles (Figure 1).

Strengths

The main strength of Kudos is its mission to maximize the visibility, impact, and accessibility of published research. It provides a unique service to scholarly communities by presenting metrics that reach across multiple publishers and publications, which can be utilized by researchers, institutions of higher education, academic publishers and the general public. Although Kudos is a new distribution platform, there is empirical evidence suggesting that Kudos increases the use of published articles. A 2016 study from Nanyang Technological University analyzed Kudo's data from the past two years and found that using the tools provided by Kudos correlated with 23 per cent higher downloads of full texts from publishers' websites (Rapple, 2016).

Part of the reason for this high rate of success may be the user-friendly nature of the interface that allows researchers to easily establish an account, create a profile, and search for their published articles. An account can be quickly created by using a basic email address to secure a username and password. In developing a user profile, the search process then allows researchers to quickly capture their articles using a digital object identifier (DOI) (Figure 2).

After adding articles to their profiles, researchers respond to a series of basic questions that highlight the significance and value that each piece of research provides to potential audiences. These applied explanations are designed to enhance the accessibility of research by illustrating what an article is about and why an article is important, while emphasizing the unique contributions and perspectives that make the material meaningful and memorable. In essence, this process encourages researchers to "bring their research to life".

Figure 1.
Growkudos.com

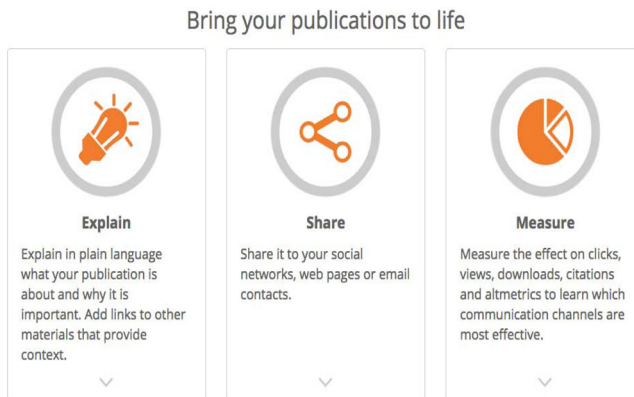


Figure 2.
Growkudos.com DOI search

To narrow your search for a journal article or book, either:

1. Enter either the DOI (Digital Object Identifier) associated with your research if you know it, or
2. Type some words from the article title or book title and an author first and last name. Note - if you see many results listed, try adding some additional distinctive words from the article title to help narrow down your search.

The primary use capabilities of Kudos, i.e., what researchers can do with the service, is presented below (Table I).

In addition to promoting public access to research, Kudos maintains a platform that captures, in a timely manner, advancements in scholarly research techniques and technologies. The founders adhere to their goal of filling gaps in academic research and publishing by partnering with other companies that provide services to academics. For example, the company has recently partnered with PaperHive, a newly formed, digital-based website focused on researcher collaboration. Through this partnership, users of Kudos receive a notification when someone comments on their article using PaperHive. This gives Kudos authors the opportunity to see and/or respond to critiques of their work. Through partnerships like this, Kudos is staying up-to-date by adapting to the needs of academic researchers, institutions, publishers, and publics.

Monitoring, supplying, and creating web-based metrics is another major function of Kudos. The metrics provided by Kudos project a variety of different measurements that allow researchers to contextualize the public significance of their work. This information can be used to assess the immediate and ongoing impact of a piece of research and/or to enhance the impact of future research. In addition to addressing the impact of research using

Input	Description
Create a profile	Provide basic contact information, including researcher name, current university affiliation, subject specialty and primary geographical location
Claim published research	Add authored articles to the profile page to establish links from the author's Kudos page to the publishers' websites
Provide applied explanations of articles to enhance the accessibility of research	Contextualize research with descriptions in the following areas: <i>What is the article about?</i> Add a simple, non-technical explanation or the lay summary of your publication to make it more accessible to a broader audience <i>Why is the article important?</i> Add an explanation of what is unique and/or timely about your work, and the difference it might make, to help increase readership <i>Provide Perspective</i> Add your own personal perspective about this publication. Note that this is your opportunity to comment as an individual, whereas the "What's it about?" and "Why is it Important?" sections are jointly created by one or more authors
Add supplemental resources	Supplement articles with external resources such as presentations, videos, interviews, figures, data sets or related publications
Share works via digital and social media	Post to Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn to add trackable links back to your publications on Kudos
Share works via professional and academic social networks	Create trackable links to copy and share via email, academic websites and networks (such as Mendeley, ResearchGate or Academia.edu.)

Table I.
Use capabilities: what
researchers can do
with Kudos

standardized measures (via the Web of Science), the variety and breadth of analytics offered via Kudos may assist researchers, institutions, publishers, and publics in capturing additional information about the impact of scholarship (Table II). The combination of social media sharing and traditional metrics tracked via the website opens up a new form of public relations for the academic community. In this way, Kudos is attempting to implement new practices to keep academic research relevant.

Limitations

While Kudos boasts of the advantages it provides to those engaged in scholarly research, it also has some significant limitations. For instance, Kudos uses a third party, <https://almetric.com>, to obtain many of the metrics provided to its users. A downside to a third party is that users must wait for data to be uploaded from that third party, which can delay access to current information and data.

Another limitation is that Kudos does not allow an author to upload full text articles to his or her Kudos publication profile page. A Kudos user can provide a link to the publisher’s website that houses the publication, but cannot independently upload full texts of his or her own article. Furthermore, authors and academic institutions may not receive the most accurate article usage data, i.e., abstract views and downloads from the publisher’s website, if publishers of their work are not members of Kudos.

One of Kudos primary strengths – its ability to promote social sharing via social media – also has some limitations. While a primary function of Kudos is to support academics’ interactions with the public by promoting researchers’ simplified explanations of their works, this information does not transfer seamlessly to social networking websites. Rather, the social media posts that Kudos currently deliver only direct links to publishers’ websites, rather than links to authors’ Kudos profiles. This form of external linking to the publishers’ pages, rather than to the authors’ pages, can be frustrating to researchers who have put extensive effort into the summary and enrichment of their articles and profiles on Kudos.

A major flaw of Kudos is the inability to search for and find an author’s research when searching by author name. The process requires a user to identify an article that then

Output	Description
Kudos views	Shows the total number of visits to the author’s Kudos publication page
Click throughs	Shows the number of click-throughs to the publisher’s website
Share referrals	Shows the number of visits to an author’s Kudos publication page accrued through sharing via email and online media
Publication views	Shows the number of times a publication’s abstract has been clicked on/read online at the publisher’s website (provided by participating publishers)
Full text downloads	Shows the number of times a publication has been downloaded/read online from the publisher’s website (provided by participating publishers)
Almetric score	Provides a representation of the amount of interest a publication has attracted across news outlets and social media websites
Web of Science times cited	Contains “Times Cited” counts from Thomson Reuters Web of Science™. Shows how many times an article has been cited and linked through the Web of Science™ with an accompanying list of the citing articles

Table II.
Key functionalities:
what Kudos provides
for researchers

provides a link to the author's profile page. When a link to an article is shared to another digital or social media platform, the follower of that link is directed to a Kudos description of the article, which links to the publisher's page housing the pay-walled article, rather than to author's profile page, which houses the author's other publications. This lack of direct access to the author's profile is a serious issue that limits researchers' opportunity to increase the reach and impact of their work.

Conclusions and directions for future research

Kudos serves multiple groups within the academic community, as well as the general public. Their unique offerings provide scholars and institutions an alternative vehicle for measuring impact and tracking publications. The general public is served by this unique website that helps to condense and digest scholarly works into a format that is more suited for general consumption. Publishers, through Kudos, are allowed to maintain monetary rewards, which allows for their continued existence.

This paper has attempted to briefly trace the development of Kudos, to explain its key functionalities and use capabilities, and to proffer some of its primary strengths and weaknesses. Future research should continue to look at the development and directions in which Kudos expands. As scholarly works and vehicles for dissemination, evaluation, and distribution grow, it becomes imperative for new and more nuanced tools to emerge for an accurate reflection of scholarly research to exist. At this time, Kudos serves this purpose.

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