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Following the leader? : network models of “world-class” universities on Twitter / Robin Shields

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Abstract

Much research on higher education has discussed the positional competition induced by global rankings and the complementary concept of “world-class” universities. This paper investigates the network of social media communication between globally ranked universities. Specifically, it examines whether universities seek to preserve and reproduce status by selectively forming associations with highly ranked institutions. It uses social network analysis and exponential random graph models to investigate data on interactions through the popular social media website Twitter.com. Findings show that social media communications are significantly related to global rankings, but that the size of this effect is quite small. Instead, structural relationships within the network and geographical location appear to have more influence on network structure. These results suggest a need to critically reassess the category of “world-class” universities and the role of global rankings in global higher education. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Shields, Robin, E-Mail: rshields@ucla.edu