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The economy of memory : publications, citations, and the paradox of effective research governance

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Abstract

More recent advancements in digital technologies have significantly alleviated the dissemination of new scientific ideas as well as the storing, searching and retrieval of large amounts of published research findings. While not denying the benefits of this novel "economy of memory," this paper endeavors to shed light on the ways in which the use of digital technologies may be linked to a distortion of the system of formal publications that facilitates the effective dissemination and collaborative building of scientific knowledge. Through combining three different strands of discussion that are often left separate – those pertaining to the cognitive effects of new technological memory systems, those pertaining to citation and publishing practices, and those regarding the effects of formalizing modes of research governance – it is also shown that this distortion is not merely a consequence of technological developments alone. Rather, such a distortion is inseparable from and potentially aggravated by the spreading of increasingly dysfunctional, formalizing research governance mechanisms. It is argued that these mechanisms run the risk of fostering the proliferation of knowledge practices that are characterized by an increasing degree of superficiality as well as the

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strategic publication of research that is of a decreasing degree of originality. If left unaddressed, this may pose a serious threat to the efficiency and effectiveness of the formal record of scientific knowledge as a tool for the dissemination of original research. By extension, this may in the long run seriously undermine the capacity of the publicly funded research system more generally. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)