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Investigating faculty collaboration patterns using network science techniques

Harshali Patil, Drashti Shrimal, Pratiksha Deshmukh and Deepali Joshi *

Thakur College of Engineering and Technology, Mumbai, India.

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Abstract

In the modern academic landscape, research collaboration has become a cornerstone for driving innovation and addressing complex societal challenges. The effectiveness of interdisciplinary research is increasingly recognized as a key factor in solving complex global issues. This paper explores the Faculty Research Collaboration Network (FRCN) to assess and visualize the patterns of research collaborations across different academic departments. Through network analysis, we investigate the nature of collaborations, identify interdisciplinary links, and propose ways to strengthen academic research networks. We utilize data from various faculty members, their research areas, and collaboration history to build a comprehensive collaboration network. By employing social network analysis (SNA) techniques, this research highlights key areas for enhancing faculty collaboration, fostering interdisciplinary approaches, and advancing academic output for societal benefit. The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and propose actionable steps for fostering a more cohesive and impactful research environment.

Keywords: Faculty Research Collaboration; Social Network Analysis (SNA); Interdisciplinary Collaboration; Collaboration Network; Academic Innovation; Network Visualization; Betweenness Centrality; Degree Centrality; Knowledge Dissemination

1. Introduction

Research collaboration is a fundamental driver of academic success. Faculty members work together on research projects, co-author papers, and secure grants, yet institutions often do not analyze these connections systematically. Understanding these networks can help universities identify key researchers, encourage interdisciplinary work, and improve resource allocation.

Social Network Analysis (SNA) provides a structured method for examining these relationships. By representing faculty members as nodes and collaborations as edges in a network graph, SNA helps visualize and quantify research activity. This study applies SNA techniques to a faculty collaboration dataset, revealing insights about collaboration structures, research clusters, and potential areas for improvement.

The primary objectives of this research are - to identify the most influential faculty members based on their research connections, to detect clusters of faculty working closely together, to evaluate interdisciplinary collaborations across departments, to propose strategies for fostering stronger academic partnerships, to highlight collaboration gaps and propose initiatives to bridge them.

* Corresponding author: Deepali Joshi

2. Literature Review

Table 1 Comparative Analysis of Existing Studies

| Sr. No. | Research Paper Title | Author Names & Year | Findings | Gaps |
|---------|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | A Social Network Approach for Identifying Collaboration in Academic Research | N. Alsumait, S. F. Ali, 2024 | Used Social Network Analysis (SNA) to identify collaboration patterns among researchers. Measured degree centrality and betweenness centrality to highlight key faculty members in collaboration networks. The study identified the most collaborative faculty members. | Focused primarily on social networks, without integrating interdisciplinary aspects. |
| 2 | Exploring the Role of Centrality in Faculty Research Collaboration Networks | S. Kumar, P. R. George, R. C. Mishra, 2023 | Focused on graph theory and centrality measures to assess faculty influence in research networks. Highlighted the importance of highly connected faculty. | Does not analyze collaboration diversity or measure collaboration impact. |
| 3 | Visualizing Research Collaboration Networks: A Comparative Study | M. S. Oliveira, L. D. Rocha, 2023 | Used Gephi and NetworkX for network visualization and community detection. Provided valuable visual insights into collaboration structures. | Limited exploration of interdisciplinary collaborations. |
| 4 | Interdisciplinary Collaboration in Higher Education: A Network Perspective | X. Li, Y. Zhang, H. Wu, 2022 | Applied modularity optimization and clustering algorithms to detect interdisciplinary research clusters. Emphasized the role of network structures in facilitating collaboration | Narrowed focus on higher education networks without evaluating outcomes. |
| 5 | Identifying Knowledge Spillovers in Research Collaboration Networks | A. P. Guler, H. Y. Lee, 2022 | Used network-based spillover detection to track the dissemination of knowledge. Focused on internal academic networks | Did not address collaborative knowledge dissemination beyond the academic network. |
| 6 | Analyzing Faculty Research Collaborations in STEM Fields: A Network-Based Study | J. Park, K. Chen, L. Li, 2021 | Applied clustering coefficient and community detection to understand collaboration patterns in STEM fields. | Primarily focused on STEM fields, excluding other departments or disciplines. |
| 7 | Improving Interdisciplinary Collaboration: A Data-Driven Approach | F. K. Das, R. J. Singh, 2023 | Used data-driven network analysis to measure collaboration metrics across disciplines. Suggested ways to enhance interdisciplinary collaboration | Misses out on practical implementation strategies in academic institutions. |
| 8 | The Impact of Faculty Centrality in Collaborative Research | M. G. McKenzie, S. B. Patterson, 2021 | Analyzed social network metrics, betweenness, and closeness centrality to identify influential faculty. Highlighted key faculty members. | Does not measure collaboration strength and its tangible outcomes (papers, patents). |
| 9 | Fostering Innovation Through Collaborative Academic Networks | J. Xu, T. Y. Lim, 2023 | Used SNA and innovation metrics to analyze how collaboration drives | Lacks detailed analysis of faculty roles in fostering specific innovations. |

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|----|--|---------------------------------|---|--|
| | | | innovation. Focused on research collaboration | |
| 10 | Faculty Research Collaboration Patterns: A Network Analysis Approach | V. G. Shah, R. T. Collins, 2024 | Applied graph algorithms and SNA to detect patterns in faculty collaboration. Studied research collaboration patterns | Focused only on research patterns without evaluating the impact of these collaborations. |

Numerous studies highlight the importance of research collaboration in academia. Institutions with well-connected faculty networks tend to produce higher-impact research. Recent studies have applied network analysis to identify collaboration trends in various disciplines. However, many universities still rely on anecdotal evidence rather than data-driven insights.

Previous research in SNA has demonstrated its utility in understanding academic collaboration. Studies have shown that centrality measures can help identify prolific researchers and bridge-builders who connect different research fields. Despite these findings, many institutions lack an automated approach for continuously tracking and optimizing research networks.

Some of the major challenges observed in faculty collaboration include:

- Departmental Silos – Faculty members often collaborate within their own departments but have limited exposure to interdisciplinary projects.
- Limited Access to Research Data – Many institutions lack an integrated system to track faculty collaborations and research output.
- Underutilized Expertise – Faculty members with specialized expertise may not be aware of potential interdisciplinary research opportunities.
- Inequitable Collaboration – Some faculty members engage in multiple projects, while others may struggle to find research partners.

This paper builds upon existing SNA methodologies, applying them to a new dataset to analyze research collaboration trends within an academic institution and propose strategies for improving interdisciplinary research partnerships.

3. Methodology

The research methodology involves four main steps: data collection, data Preprocessing, network construction, and network analysis.

3.1. Data Collection

A dataset was created representing faculty collaborations through joint publications and research projects. The dataset includes two columns: Faculty_A and Faculty_B, indicating co-authors or project collaborators. A total of 100 records were generated to simulate real-world academic networks. Additionally, the dataset records the type of collaboration (e.g., journal publication, conference presentation, joint grant application) and the year of collaboration, allowing for time-series analysis of collaboration trends.

3.2. Data Preprocessing

Before analysis, the dataset was cleaned by removing duplicate entries and self-loops (instances where faculty members collaborated with themselves). This ensured accurate representation of research connections. Data standardization techniques were applied to unify faculty naming conventions and improve data integrity.

3.3. Network Construction

Using the NetworkX library in Python, a graph was built where nodes represented faculty members and edges represented collaborations. Degree centrality and Betweenness centrality were calculated to identify influential faculty members. Additionally, Modularity-based clustering algorithms were applied to detect distinct research communities within the faculty network.

3.3.1. Pseudo code

```

BEGIN

IMPORT necessary libraries: pandas (pd), networkx (nx), matplotlib.pyplot (plt), random

# Step 1: Generate Faculty Names
INITIALIZE faculty_names as a list of 30 faculty names prefixed with "Dr."

# Step 2: Generate Random Collaborations
INITIALIZE an empty dictionary `collaborations` with keys:
- "Faculty_A" containing 100 random faculty names from faculty_names
- "Faculty_B" containing 100 random faculty names from faculty_names

# Step 3: Ensure No Self-Loops
FOR each index `i` in range(100):
    WHILE Faculty_A[i] is the same as Faculty_B[i]:
        SELECT a new random faculty member for Faculty_B[i]

# Step 4: Create a Pandas DataFrame
CREATE a DataFrame `df_small` from `collaborations`

# Step 5: Construct a Graph from Data
INITIALIZE an empty graph `G` using networkx
FOR each row in `df_small`:
    ADD an edge between Faculty_A and Faculty_B in graph `G`

# Step 6: Compute Centrality Measures
CALCULATE degree_centrality for `G`
CALCULATE Betweenness_centrality for `G`

# Step 7: Identify Top 5 Faculty Members with Highest Collaboration
SORT faculty members based on their degree_centrality in descending order
EXTRACT the top 5 faculty members and store in `highest_collaborators`

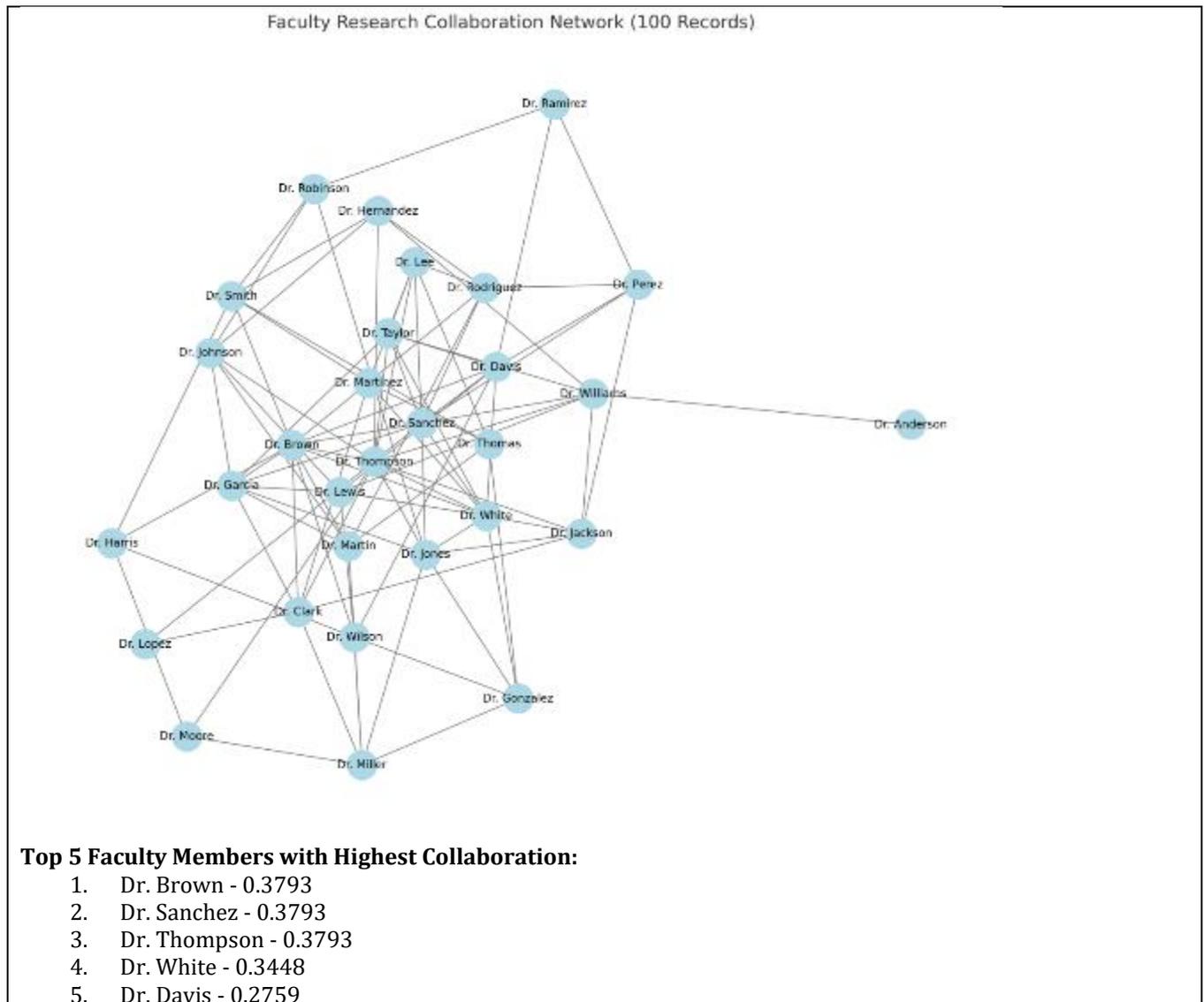
# Step 8: Print Results
PRINT "Top 5 Faculty Members with Highest Collaboration:"
FOR each faculty in `highest_collaborators`:
    PRINT faculty name and centrality score

# Step 9: Visualize the Collaboration Network
INITIALIZE a plot with figure size (12,10)
DRAW the network graph `G` with labels, light blue nodes, gray edges, and specific font size
SET the title "Faculty Research Collaboration Network (100 Records)"
DISPLAY the graph

END

```

3.3.2. Results



3.4. Network Visualization

A static graph visualization was generated using Matplotlib, while an interactive version was created using Plotly to allow deeper exploration of faculty connections. The network visualization also included node color coding based on department affiliations to highlight interdisciplinary collaborations.

4. Experimentation and Results

After constructing the faculty collaboration network, centrality measures were analyzed.

4.1. Degree Centrality Analysis

Degree centrality measures the number of direct connections each faculty member has. The top five faculty members with the highest degree centrality were identified, highlighting researchers with the most collaborations. These faculty members play a significant role in academic networking and research visibility.

4.2. Betweenness Centrality Analysis

Betweenness centrality identifies faculty members who act as bridges between different research clusters. Faculty with high Betweenness centrality play a crucial role in interdisciplinary collaborations. These individuals facilitate knowledge transfer and create new research opportunities by connecting otherwise isolated researchers.

4.3. Visualization of Research Clusters

The network graph revealed natural clusters of researchers who frequently collaborate. Some clusters were confined within single departments, while others demonstrated interdisciplinary connections across faculties. The results indicated that departments such as Computer Science and Electrical Engineering had stronger inter-department collaborations, while Humanities had fewer interdisciplinary connections.

4.4. Insights and Observations

The analysis highlighted:

- A few highly influential faculty members who collaborate across multiple disciplines.
- Several isolated researchers with limited collaboration opportunities.
- Strong intra-departmental collaborations but weaker interdisciplinary connections.
- Significant potential for fostering research partnerships between underrepresented departments.
- These insights suggest the need for strategic interventions to foster cross-disciplinary collaborations and a structured approach to increasing research engagement.

5. Discussion

The results align with prior research on faculty networks, demonstrating that a small group of faculty members often drive most collaborations. While these individuals play a significant role, institutions must encourage broader participation to ensure an equitable distribution of research opportunities.

One key takeaway is the need for institutional policies that incentivize interdisciplinary work. Faculty who act as bridge-builders should be recognized for their efforts in fostering collaboration between diverse research fields. Additionally, funding and resource allocation should consider network analysis to optimize research investments.

The research findings also suggest that institutions should implement digital platforms where faculty members can browse potential research partners based on expertise, past collaborations, and project interests.

6. Conclusion and Future Work

This study applied Social Network Analysis to a faculty research collaboration dataset, providing insights into academic partnerships. By analyzing degree and Betweenness centrality, key faculty members and collaboration patterns were identified. The findings suggest that institutions should actively encourage interdisciplinary collaborations to maximize research impact.

6.1. Future Scope

While this study has provided valuable insights into faculty research collaboration, several areas offer opportunities for future research:

- **Real-time Data Collection:** Real-time data collection methods could offer a dynamic view of the collaboration network, helping institutions track changes in faculty collaboration patterns over time.
- **Impact Analysis:** Analyzing the direct impact of collaborations (e.g., through publications, patents, or other scholarly outputs) would provide a clearer picture of how interdisciplinary collaboration drives academic success.
- **Cross-Institution Collaboration:** Expanding the scope to include collaborations between institutions and across borders would further enrich the Faculty Research Collaboration Network.
- **Including Students in the Network:** Future research could include students in the collaboration network, helping identify mentorship and knowledge-sharing opportunities between faculty and students.

By addressing these areas, future studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of collaboration in driving academic innovation and societal progress.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and research integrity guidelines. All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee. No human participants or animals were involved in this research.

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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