SOCIAL NETWORKS AND RESEARCH OUTPUT

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Abstract—We study how knowledge about the social network of an individual researcher, as embodied in his coauthor relations, helps us in developing a more accurate prediction of his or her future productivity. We find that incorporating information about coauthor networks leads to a modest improvement in the accuracy of forecasts on individual output, over and above what we can predict based on the knowledge of past individual output. Second, we find that the informativeness of networks dissipates over the lifetime of a researcher's career. This suggests that the signaling content of the network is quantitatively more important than the flow of ideas.

I. Introduction

GOOD recruitment requires an accurate prediction of a candidate's potential future performance. Sports clubs, academic departments, and business firms routinely use past performance as a guide to predict the potential of applicants and to forecast their future performance. In this paper, the focus is on researchers.

Social interaction is an important aspect of research activity: researchers discuss and comment on each other's work, they assess the work of others for publication and for prizes, and they join together to coauthor publications. Scientific collaboration involves the exchange of opinions and ideas and facilitates the generation of new ideas. Access to new and original ideas in turn may help researchers be more productive. It follows that other things being equal, individuals who are better connected and more central in their professional network may be more productive in the future.

Network connectedness and centrality arise out of links created by individuals and thus reflect their individual characteristics: ability, sociability, and ambition, for example. Since the ability of a researcher is imperfectly known, the existence of such ties may be informative.

These considerations suggest that someone's collaboration network is related to his or her research output in two ways: the network serves as a conduit of ideas and signals individual quality. The first channel suggests a causal relationship from network to research output, whereas the second does not. Determining causality would clarify the importance of the two channels. Unfortunately, as is known in the literature on social interactions (Manski, 1993; Moffit, 2001), identifying network effects in a causal sense is difficult in the absence of randomized experiments.

In this paper, we take an alternative route: we focus on the predictive power of social networks in terms of future research output. That is, we investigate how much current and past information on collaboration networks contributes to forecasting future research output. Causality in the sense of prediction informativeness is known as Granger causality and is commonly analyzed in the macroeconometrics literature; for example, Stock and Watson (1999) investigate the predictive power of unemployment rate and other macroeconomics variables on forecasting inflation.[1]

Finding that network variables Granger-cause future output does not constitute conclusive evidence of causal network effects in the traditional sense. Nonetheless, it implies that knowledge of a researcher's network can potentially be used by an academic department in making recruitment decisions.

We apply this methodology to evaluate the predictive power of collaboration networks on future research output, measured in terms of future publications in economics. We first ask whether social network measures help predict future research output beyond the information contained in individual past performance. We then investigate which specific network variables are informative and how their informativeness varies over a researcher's career.

Our first set of findings is about the information value of networks. We find that including information about coauthor networks leads to an improvement in the accuracy of forecasts about individual output over and above what we can predict based on past individual output. The effect is significant but modest; the root mean squared error in predicting future productivity falls from 0.773 to 0.758 and the R^2 increases from 0.395 to 0.417. We also observe that several network variables, such as productivity of coauthors, closeness centrality, and the number of coauthors, have predictive power. Of those, the productivity of coauthors is the most informative network statistic among those we examine.

Second, the predictive power of network information varies over a researcher's career: it is more powerful for young researchers but declines systematically with career time. By contrast, information on recent past output remains a strong predictor of future output over an author's entire career. As a result, fourteen years after the onset of a

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[1] A few examples of applications that have determined the appropriateness of a model based on its ability to predict are Swanson and White (1997), Sullivan, Timmermann, and White (1999), Lettau and Ludvigson (2001), Rapach and Wohar (2002) and Hong and Lee (2003).

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researcher's publishing career, networks do not have any predictive value on future research output over and above what can be predicted using recent and past output alone.

Our third set of findings is about the relation between author ability and the predictive value of networks. We partition individual authors in terms of past productivity and examine the extent to which network variables predict their future productivity. We find that the predictive value of network variables is nonmonotonic with respect to past productivity. Network variables do not predict the future productivity of individuals with below-average initial productivity. They are somewhat informative for individuals in the highest past-productivity tier group. But they are most informative about individuals in between. In fact, for these individuals, networks contain more information about their future productivity than recent research output. Taken together, these results predict that academic recruiters would benefit from gathering and analyzing information about the coauthor network of young researchers, especially for those who are relatively productive.

This paper is a contribution to the empirical study of social interactions. Traditionally, economists have studied the question of how social interactions affect behavior across well-defined groups, paying special attention to the difficulty of empirically identifying social interaction effects. (For an overview of this work, see, e.g., Moffitt (2001) and Glaeser and Scheinkman, 2003.) In recent years, interest has shifted to the ways by which the architecture of social networks influences behavior and outcomes.[2] Recent empirical papers on network effects include Bramoullé, Djebbari and Fortin (2009), Calvó-Armengol, Patacchini, and Zenou (2009), Conley and Udry (2010), and Fafchamps, Goyal, and van der Leij (2010).

This paper is also related to a more specialized literature on research productivity. Two recent papers, Azoulay, Zivin, and Wang (2010) and Waldinger (2010), both use the unanticipated removal of individuals as a natural experiment to measure network effects on researchers' productivity. Azoulay et al. (2010) study the effects of the unexpected death of superstar life scientists. Their main finding is that coauthors of these superstars experience a 5% to 8% decline in their publication rate. Waldinger (2010) studies the dismissal of Jewish professors from Nazi Germany in 1933 to 1934. His main finding is that a fall in the quality of a faculty has significant and long-lasting effects on the outcomes of research students. Our paper quantifies the predictive power of network information over and above the information contained in past output.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section II lays out the empirical framework. Section III describes the data and defines the variables. Section IV presents our findings. Section V checks the robustness of our main findings. Section VI concludes.

[2] For a survey of the theoretical work on social networks see Goyal (2007), Jackson (2008), and Vega-Redondo (2007).

II. Empirical Framework

It is standard practice in most organizations to look at the past performance of job candidates as a guide to their future output. This is certainly true for the recruitment and promotion of researchers, possibly because research output—journal articles and books—is publicly observable.

The practice of looking at past performance appears to rest on two ideas. The first is that a researcher's output largely depends on ability and effort. The second is that individuals are aware of the relationship between performance and reward and consequently exert effort consistent with their career goals and ambition. This potentially creates a stable relationship between ability and ambition, on the one hand, and individual performance, on the other hand. Given this relationship, it is possible to (imperfectly) predict future output on the basis of past output. In this paper, we start by asking how well past performance predicts future output.

We then ask if future output can be better predicted if we include information about an individual's research network. Social interaction among researchers takes a variety of forms, some of it more tangible than others. Our focus is on social interaction, reflected in the coauthorship of a published paper, a concrete and quantifiable form of interaction. Coauthorship of academic articles in economics rarely involves more than four authors, so it is likely that coauthorship entails personal interaction. Moreover, given the length of papers and the duration of the review process in economics, it is reasonable to suppose that collaboration entails communication over an extended period of time. These considerations—personal interaction and sustained communication—in turn suggest several ways by which someone's coauthorship network can reveal valuable information on their future productivity. We focus on two: research networks as a conduit of ideas and coauthorship as a signal about unobserved ability and career objectives.

Consider first the role of research networks as a conduit for ideas. Communication in the course of research collaboration involves the exchange of ideas, so we expect that a researcher who is collaborating with highly creative and productive people has access to more new ideas. This in turn suggests that a researcher who is close to more productive researchers may have early access to new ideas. As early publication is a key element in the research process, early access to new ideas can lead to greater productivity. These considerations lead us to expect that other things being equal, an individual who is in close proximity to highly productive authors will on average have greater future productivity.

Proximity need not be immediate, however: if A coauthors with B and B coauthors with C, then ideas may flow from A to C through their common collaborator B. The same argument can be extended to larger network neighborhoods. It follows that authors who are more central in the research network are expected to have earlier and better access to new research ideas.

As a first step, we look at how the productivity of an individual, say i, varies with the productivity of his or her coauthors. We then examine whether i's future productivity depends on the past productivity of the coauthors of his or her coauthors. Finally, we generalize this idea to i's centrality in the network in terms of how close a researcher is to all other researchers (closeness) or how critical a researcher is to connections among other researchers (betweenness)—the idea being that centrality gives privileged access to ideas that can help a researcher's productivity.

Access to new ideas may open valuable opportunities, but it takes ability and effort to turn a valuable idea into a publication in an academic journal. It is reasonable to suppose that the usefulness of new ideas varies with ability and effort. In particular, a more able researcher is probably better able than a less able researcher to turn the ideas accessed through the network into publications. Since ability and industriousness are reflected in past performance, we expect the value of a social network to vary with past performance. To investigate this possibility, we partition researchers into different-tier groups based on their past performance and examine whether the predictive power of having productive coauthors and other related network variables varies systematically across tier groups.

The second way by which network information may help predict future output is that the quantity and quality of one's coauthors is correlated with, and thus can serve as a signal for, an individual's hidden ability and ambition. Given the commitment of time and effort involved in a research collaboration, it is reasonable to assume that researchers do not casually engage in a collaborative research venture. Hence when a highly productive researcher forms and maintains a collaboration with another, possibly more junior, researcher i, this link reveals positive attributes of i that could not be inferred from other observable data. Over time, however, evidence on i's performance accumulates, and residual uncertainty about i's ability and industriousness decreases. We therefore expect the signal value of network characteristics to be higher at the beginning of a researcher's career and to fall afterward.

Our empirical strategy is based on these ideas. Since our focus is on predictive power, we worry that overfitting may bias inference. To avoid this, we divide the sample into two halves—one used to obtain parameter estimates and the other to assess the out-of-sample predictive power of these estimates. We thus begin by randomly dividing the authors into two equal-size groups. The first half of the authors is used to estimate a regression model of researcher output. We then use the estimated coefficients obtained from the model fitted on the first half of the authors to predict researcher output for the authors in the second half of the data. We compare these predictions with actual output.

The purpose of this procedure is to assess the out-of-sample prediction performance of the model. The reason for using out-of-sample predictions is that in-sample errors are likely to understate forecasting errors. As Fildes and Makridakis (1995) stated, "The performance of a model on data outside that used in its construction remains the touchstone for its utility in all applications" regarding predictions. Another drawback of in-sample tests is that they tend to reject the null hypothesis of predictability. In other words, in-sample tests of predictability may spuriously indicate predictability when there is none.[3]

The rest of this section develops some terminology and presents the regressions more formally. We begin by describing the first step of our procedure and then explain how we assess prediction performance. The dependent variable of interest is a measure y_{it} of the future output of author i at time t, defined in more detail in section 3. This measure takes into account the number of articles published, the length of each article, and the ranking of the journal where the article appears.

We first study predictions of y_{it} based on past output and a set of controls x_{it}. Control variables include cumulative output since the start of i's career until $t-5$; career time dummies; year dummies; and the number of years since i's last publication. Career time dummies are included to capture career cycle effects—that researchers publish less as they approach retirement. We then examine by how much recent research output and network characteristics improve the prediction. We also compare the accuracy of the prediction when we use only past output and when we combine it with recent network characteristics.

The order of the regression models we estimate is as follows. We start with benchmark model 0, which examines the predictive power of the control variables x_{it}:

$$\text{Model 0} \qquad y_{i,t+1} = x_{it}\beta + \varepsilon_{it}.$$

We then include recent individual output $y_{i,t}$ as additional regressor. This yields model 1:

$$\text{Model 1} \qquad y_{i,t+1} = x_{it}\beta + y_{it}\gamma_1 + \varepsilon_{it}.$$

In model 2 we investigate the predictive power of network variables $z_{i,t}$:

$$\text{Model 2} \qquad y_{i,t+1} = x_{it}\beta + z_{it}\gamma_2 + \varepsilon_{it}.$$

Network variables include the number of i's coauthors up to time t, the productivity of these coauthors, and different network centrality measures detailed in the data section. We estimate model 2 first with one network variable at a time, then include network variables simultaneously.

Finally, in model 3 we ask if network variables z_{it} improve the prediction of future output over and above

[3] Arguments in favor of using out-of-sample predictions can be found in Ashley, Granger, and Schmalensee (1980) who state that "a sound and natural approach" to testing predictability "must rely primarily on the out-of-sample forecasting performance of models relating the original series of interest" (p. 1149). Along with Fair and Shiller (1990), they also conjecture that out-of-sample inference is more robust to model selection biases and to overfitting or data mining.

the prediction obtained from model 1, that is, from past productivity:

$$\text{Model 3} \qquad y_{i,t+1} = x_{it}\beta + y_{it}\gamma_1 + z_{it}\gamma_2 + \varepsilon_{it}.$$

Here too we first consider one network variable at a time to ascertain which network characteristics have more predictive power. We also estimate model 3 with several network variables together to evaluate the overall information contained in the network.

Models 0, 1, and 2 are nested in model 3. A comparison of models 1 and 2 allows us to investigate the relative information content of recent individual output and recent social network. A comparison of models 1 and 3 examines whether social network variables have explanatory power over and above the information contained in recent individual output.

For models 2 and 3, we consider both regressions with a single network variable and regressions with multiple network variables. In the latter case, since our ultimate purpose is to predict research output, we need a criterion to select a parsimonious set of regressors, so as to avoid overfitting. To select among social network regressors, we use the Bayesian information criterion (BIC). We find that in our case, the lowest values of the BIC are obtained when all the network variables are included, which is why our final specification of the multivariate model includes them all.

The previous models are called restricted models because we are imposing the constraint that the lagged productivity variables since the start of i's career until $t-5$ have the same effect on future productivity. Moreover, in these models, we consider only five-year network variables: each network variable is computed assuming that a link between author i and her coauthor has a predictive effect that lasts for five years. These restricted models are simple to estimate and allow us to compare the predictive power of network variables and recent output. But we may be able to improve the predictions of the restricted models by relaxing the constraint that productivity lags have the same coefficient. Similarly, the predictive power of the network variables might increase if we include several lags of the network variables.

To see whether this is the case, we also estimates versions of models 1, 2, and 3 that include several lags of the productivity and network variables. The number of lags of the productivity and network variables is selected using the BIC. We call these the unrestricted models. The benchmark unrestricted model, model 1, contains thirteen lags of the productivity variable and a new set of control variables x_{it}: career dummies, time dummies, and years since the last publication. This model examines the predictive power of past output:

$$\text{Model 1'} \qquad y_{i,t+1} = x_{it}\beta + \sum_{s=0}^{12} y_{it-s}\gamma_s + \varepsilon_{it}.$$

We also consider an unrestricted model with only network information, model 2':

$$\text{Model 2'} \qquad y_{i,t+1} = x_{it}\beta + \sum_{s=0}^{T} z_{it-s}\theta_s + \varepsilon_{it},$$

where T is the maximum lag length of the network variable selected using the BIC criteria. For example, in $T = 14$ we include lags from z_{it-14} to $z_{it} - z_{it-14}$ in the network variable obtained combining all joint publications from $t-14$ to t, and z_{it} is the network variable computed using the joint publications at period t. A comparison of models 1' and 2' provides insights about the importance of past networks, relative to past output.

The unrestricted model 3, model 3', combines all past output and past network information:

$$\text{Model 3'} \qquad y_{i,t+1} = x_{it}\beta + \sum_{s=0}^{12} y_{it-s}\gamma_s + \sum_{s=0}^{T} z_{it-s}\theta_s + \varepsilon_{it}.$$

We also estimate models 2' and 3' with multiple network variables. A comparison of models 1' and 3' allows us to examine the explanatory power of network variables over and above knowledge of past output.

This describes the first step of our analysis. In the second step, we evaluate the predictive accuracy of the different models. To this effect, we compare, in the second half of the data, the actual research output $y_{i,t+1}$ to the predictions $\widehat{y}_{i,t+1}$ obtained by applying to authors in the second half of the data the regression coefficients of restricted models 0 to 3 and unrestricted models 1' to 3' obtained from the first half of the data. To evaluate the prediction accuracy of $\widehat{y}_{i,t+1}$, we report the root-mean-squared errors (RMSE) defined as

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i,t}(y_{i,t+1} - \widehat{y}_{i,t+1})^2}.$$

If the introduction of an explanatory variable in $\widehat{y}_{i,t+1}$ decreases the out-of-sample RMSE, this variable contains useful information that helps predict researchers' future productivity.

In order to assess whether forecasts from two models are significantly different, we use a test described by Diebold and Mariano (1995). This test is based on the loss differential of forecasting the future output of an individual i, $d_{i,t}$. As we measure the accuracy of each forecast by a squared error loss function (RMSE), we apply the Diebold-Mariano test to a squared loss differential, that is,

$$d_{i,t} = \varepsilon_{Ai,t}^2 - \varepsilon_{Bi,t}^2,$$

where A is a competing model and B is the benchmark model.

To determine if one model predicts better, we test the null hypothesis, $H_0 : E[d_{i,t}] = 0$, against the alternative,

$H_1 : E[d_{i,t}] \neq 0$. Under the null hypothesis, the Diebold-Mariano test is

$$\frac{\overline{d}}{\sqrt{\hat{V}(\overline{d})/n}} \backsim N(0,1),$$

where $\overline{d} = n^{-1}\sum_{i,t} d_{i,t}$, is the average loss differential and $\hat{V}(\overline{d})$ is a consistent estimate of the asymptotic (long-run) variance of $\sqrt{n}\overline{d}$. We adjust for serial correlation by using a Newey-West type estimator of $\hat{V}(\overline{d})$.[4]

III. Data

The data used for this paper are drawn from the EconLit database, a bibliography of journals in economics compiled by the editors of the *Journal of Economic Literature*. From this database, we use information on all articles published between 1970 and 1999. These data are the same as those analyzed by Goyal, van der Leij, and Moraga-González (2006), Fafchamps et al. (2010), van der Leij and Goyal (2011), and Ductor (2014).

A. *Definition of variables*

The output q_{it} of author i in year t is defined as

$$q_{it} = \sum_{j \in S_{it}} \text{journal quality}_j, \tag{1}$$

where S_{it} is the set of articles j of individual i published in year t. When available, the journal quality variable is taken from the work of Kodrzycki and Yu (2006, hereafter KY).[5] Unfortunately, KY do not include in their analysis all the journals in the EconLit database. To avoid losing information and minimizing measurement error in research output, we construct a prediction of the KY quality index of journals not included in their list.[6] The actual KY journal quality index is used whenever available.

We are interested in predicting future output. In economics, the annual number of papers per author is small and affected by erratic publication lags. We therefore need a reasonable time window over which to aggregate output. The results presented here are based on a three-year window, but our findings are insensitive to the use of alternative window length (e.g., five years).[7] Our dependent variable of interest is thus the output of author i in years $t+1, t+2, t+3$:

$$q^f_{it} = q_{i,t+1} + q_{i,t+2} + q_{i,t+3} \tag{2}$$

Unsurprisingly, q^f_i has a long upper tail. To avoid our results from being entirely driven by a handful of highly productive individuals, we log the dependent variable as follows:[8]

$$y_{i,t+1} = \ln\left(1 + q^f_{it}\right).$$

The analysis presented in the rest of the paper uses $y_{i,t+1}$ as dependent variable.

We expect recent productivity to better predict output over the next three years than older output. To capture this idea, we divide past output into two parts in the restricted models: cumulative output until period $t-5$, which captures i's historical production and is used as control variable, and output from $t-4$ until t, which represents i's recent productivity and is expected to be a strong predictor of future output. We define recent output q^r_{it} from t to $t-4$ as

$$q^r_{it} = q_{it} + q_{i,t-1} + q_{i,t-2} + q_{i,t-3} + q_{i,t-4}.$$

Control variables in the restricted models x_{it} include cumulative output q^c_{it} from the start t_{i0} of i's career until $t-5$:

$$q^c_{it} = q_{i,t_{i0}} + \ldots q_{i,t-6} + q_{i,t-5},$$

where t_{i0} is the year in which individual i obtained his or her first publication. We use $\ln(1+q^c_{i,t})$ and $\ln(1+q^r_{i,t})$ as regressors, since the distribution of both variables presents fat tails. We also include the number of years r_{it} with no published article since i's last article was published:

$$r_{it} = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } q_{it} > 0 \\ r_{i,t-1} + 1 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \text{ and}$$
$$r_{i,t_{i0}} = 0.$$

Variable r_{it} is used as proxy for leave or retirement from academics: the longer someone has not published, the more likely he or she has retired or left research. Other controls include career time dummies c_{it} and year dummies t. To summarize, $x_{it} = \{q^c_{it}, r_{it}, c_{it}, t\}$.

[4] Formally, $\hat{V}(\overline{d}) = \sum_i(\hat{\gamma}_0 + 2\sum_{\tau=1}^{T-t} w_{m(T)}\hat{\gamma}_\tau)$, and $\hat{\gamma}_\tau = \hat{\text{Cov}}(d_{i,t}, d_{i,t-\tau})$, where $w_{m(T)}$ is the Bartlett Kernel function:

$$w_{m(T)} = \begin{cases} \left(1 - \frac{\tau}{m(T)}\right) & \text{if } 0 \leq \frac{\tau}{m(T)} \leq 1, \\ 0, & \text{otherwise,} \end{cases}$$

and $m(T)$, also known as the truncation lag, is a number growing with T, the number of periods in the panel. The truncation lag has been chosen by the BIC.

[5] We do not consider citations because they often materialize long after a paper has been published. This means that authors at the beginning of their career often have a small citation record, so, for them at least, citations have little predictive power.

[6] To do this, we regress the KY index on commonly available information of each journal listed in EconLit, such as the number of published articles per year, the impact factor, the immediacy index, the Tinbergen Institute Index, an economics dummy, interaction terms between the economics dummy and the impact factor, and various citation measures. Estimated coefficients from this regression are then used to obtain a predicted KY journal quality index for journals not in their list. Since most of the journals that KY omitted are not highly ranked, their predicted quality index is quite small.

[7] The predictive power of network variables is slightly higher under a five years window. Results are available in the online appendix.

[8] We have considered alternative nonlinear models in which the dependent variable does not have to be transformed, such as Poisson, nonnegative binomial, and zero inflated nonnegative binomial models. In terms of out-of-sample RMSE, the specification that provides the best forecast is $\ln(x+1)$, which is the one we report here. See the online appendix for more details.

In the unrestricted models 1' and 3', we relax the constraint imposed in q^r_{it} and q^c_{it}. In these models, we consider thirteen lags of the productivity variable:

$$y_{i,t-s} = \ln\left(1 + q_{i,t-s} + q_{i,t-s-1} + q_{i,t-s-2}\right) \quad \forall s = 0, \ldots, 12.$$

Control variables in the unrestricted models are the same as in the restricted models but excluding past output.

Next we turn to the network variables. Given that we wish to investigate whether network characteristics have predictive power over and above that of recent productivity, network variables must be constructed in such a way that they do not contain information outside the time window of q^r_{it}. We therefore define the five-year coauthorship network $G_{t,5}$ at time t over the same time window as q^r_{it} for the restricted models, that is, using all joint publications from year $t-4$ to t. At time t, two authors i and j are said to have a link $g_{ij,t}$ in $G_{t,5}$ if they have published in an EconLit journal in years $t-4$ to t. Otherwise, $g_{ij,t} = 0$.

For unrestricted models 2' and 3', we introduce different coauthorship networks, $G_{t,s}$, where s determines the number of years that a link between author i and her coauthor j lasts. For example, in network $G_{t,10}$, we assume that the effects from a collaboration last during ten years, from $t-9$ to t.

The set of network statistics that we construct from $G_{t,s}$ is motivated by the theoretical discussion of section II. Some of the network statistics we include in our analysis are, on a priori grounds, more correlated with access to new scientific ideas; others are included because they are thought to have a high signaling potential. Measures of network topology such as centrality and degree reflect network proximity and thus belong primarily to the first category, while other measures, such as the productivity of coauthors, are likely to have greater signaling potential.

Based on these observations, the list of network variables that we use in the analysis is as follows. We say that there is a path between i and j in $G_{t,s}$ if $g_{ij,t} = 1$ at some period from $t-(s-1)$ to t or there exists a set of distinct nodes $j_1, \ldots, j_m$, such that $g_{ij_1,t} = g_{j_1j_2,t} = \ldots = g_{j_mj,t} = 1$. The length of such a path is $m+1$. The distance $d(i,j;G_{t,s})$ is the length of the shortest path between i and j in $G_{t,s}$. We use the following standard definitions:

- *(First-order) degree* is the number of coauthors that i has in period $t-(s-1)$ to t, $n_{1i,t} = |N_i(G_{t,s})|$, where $N_i(G_{t,s}) = \{j : g_{ij,t} = 1\}$.
- *(Second-order) degree* is the number of nodes at distance 2 from i in period $t-(s-1)$ to t, $n_{2i,t} = |N^2_i(G_{t,s})|$, where $N^2_i(G_{t,s}) = \{k : d(i,k;G_{t,s}) = 2\}$.
- *Giant component*: The giant component in $G_{t,s}$ is the largest subset of nodes such that there exists a path between each pair of nodes in the giant component and no path to a node outside. We create a dummy variable that takes value 1 if an author belongs to the giant component and 0 otherwise.

Within the giant component, we consider, the following two global proximity measures:[9]

- *Closeness centrality* $C^c_{i,t}$ is the inverse of the average distance of a node to other nodes within the giant component and is defined as

$$C^c_{i,t} = \frac{n_t - 1}{\sum_{j \neq i} d(i,j;G_{t,s})},$$

where n_t is the size of the giant component in year t in the coauthorship network $G_{t,s}$. Because $C^c_{i,t}$ has fat tails, we use $\ln(1 + C^c_{i,t})$ as a regressor instead.
- *Betweenness centrality* $C^b_{i,t}$ is the frequency of the shortest paths passing through node i and is calculated as

$$C^b_{i,t} = \sum_{j \neq k : j,k \neq i} \frac{\tau^i_{j,k}(G_{t,s})}{\tau_{j,k}(G_{t,s})},$$

where $\tau^i_{j,k}(G_{t,s})$ is the number of shortest paths between j and k in $G_{t,s}$ that pass through node i, and $\tau_{j,k}(G_{t,s})$ is the total number of shortest paths between j and k in $G_{t,s}$. In the regression analysis, we similarly use $\ln(1 + C^b_{i,t})$ as regressor.

Next, we define regressors that capture the productivity of coauthors and that of coauthors of coauthors. We apply the $\ln(x+1)$ transformation to them as well:

- *Productivity of coauthors* is defined as the output of coauthors of author i from $t-(s-1)$ to t,

$$q^1_{it} = \sum_{j \in N_i(G_{t,s})} q^r_{jt}$$

where q^r_{jt} is the output of j from period $t-(s-1)$ to period t (excluding papers that are coauthored with i).
- *Productivity of coauthors of coauthors* is the output of coauthor of coauthors of author i from $t-(s-1)$ to t,

$$q^2_{it} = \sum_{k \in N^2_i(G_{t,s})} q^r_{kt},$$

where q^r_{kt} is the output of k from $t-(s-1)$ to t excluding papers that are coauthored with the neighbors of i, $N_i(G_{t,s})$.

We also include a dummy variable that takes the value 1 for author i if one of i's coauthors in $G_{t,s}$ has an output q^r_{jt} in the top 1% of the distribution of q^r_{it}.

In the restricted models, all the network variables are obtained using $G_{t,5}$, that is, combining all joint publications

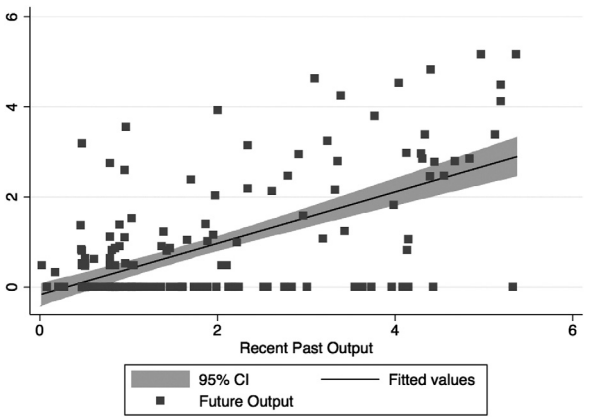
[9] For a careful discussion on the interpretation of centrality measures, see Wasserman and Faust (1994).

TABLE 1.—SUMMARY STATISTICS

	Mean	SD	Correlations
Output			
Future productivity	.41	.99	1
Past stock output	1.62	1.44	.44
Recent past output	.62	1.20	.69
Network variables			
Degree	.58	1.21	.55
Degree of order 2	.90	3.12	.46
Giant component	.10	.30	.47
Closeness centrality	.01	.02	.48
Betweenness centrality	.50	2.29	.48
Coauthors' productivity	.59	1.40	.58
Coauthors of coauthors' prod.	.58	1.58	.54
Working with top 1%	.01	.11	.34
Number of observations	1,697,415	1,697,415	1,697,415
Number of authors	75,109	75,109	75,109

Network variables are computed assuming that a link between two authors lasts during five years (five-year network variables). The number of observations used to obtain the statics for future output is 1,335,428, for recent past output it is 1,230,335, and for past stock output it is 1,132,248. All the correlations coefficients are obtained using the same number of observations, 872,344.

FIGURE 1.—A SCATTER PLOT OF FUTURE OUTPUT AND RECENT PAST OUTPUT



from $t-4$ to t. In contrast, in the unrestricted models, we include network variables obtained using different periods of the coauthorship networks, from $G_{t,1}$ to $G_{t,15}$. The number of network periods is selected according to the BIC.

B. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 provides summary statistics of the variables included in the analysis. Column 1 provides the mean value of each variable, column 2 the standard deviation, and column 3 correlations between the different variables and future productivity.

For the restricted model, we excluded observations relative to authors in the earliest stage of their career, for which $c_{it} < 6$. The reason is that these authors have not yet established a publication record and network, so there is little information on which to form predictions of future output. This assumption is relaxed in the unrestricted models, where we consider the full sample, 1,335,428 observations, after replacing the missing lagged productivity and network variables by 0s. The rationale for doing so is that authors who have just started their career have no past output and coauthorship, hence the value of their lagged productivity and network variables is truly 0.

We draw attention to some distinctive features of the data. First, we observe that the variance in future output q^f_{it} is large, with a standard deviation 2.41 times larger than the mean. There is a high, positive correlation of 0.69 between recent output q^r_{jt} and future output q^f_{it}. Figure 1 shows a scatter plot and a linear regression line with the confidence interval between q^f_{it} and q^r_{jt} for 1,000 random selected observations. This visually confirms that, as anticipated, recent past output has a strong predictive power on future output.

Second, we observe a high correlation between q^f_{it} and several five-year network variables such as coauthors' output q^1_{it}, author degree, and closeness and betweenness centrality. The network variable most highly correlated with future productivity is the productivity of i's coauthors, q^1_{it}, with a correlation coefficient of 0.58. Other network variables such as degree, closeness, and betweenness centrality are also highly correlated with future output q^f_{it}. Figure 2 shows the relationship between some five-year network variables and future output.

IV. Empirical Findings

We have seen a reasonably strong correlation between future output and recent past output, but also between future output and the characteristics of i's recent coauthorship network. We now turn to a multivariate analysis and estimate the different models outlined in section II. We start by presenting the results on the predictive power of recent past output. We then examine the relation between the productivity of an individual author and the predictive power of network variables.

A. Predicting Future Output

Table 2 presents the prediction results for model 0, the baseline model with controls $x_{it} = \{q^c_{it}, r_{it}, c_{it}, t\}$; model 1, which includes recent output q^r_{it}; and model 2, which includes a network variable, one per regression. Column 1 presents the R^2 of the regression on the in-sample data for each model. Column 2 shows the out-of-sample RMSE for each model. Column 3 compares the RMSE of model 1/model 2 with the benchmark model, model 0. Column 4 shows the coefficient of each regressor.

Recent output q^r_{it} explains slightly less than half of the variation in future output q^f_{it}. Half of the variation in q^f_{it}—around 51% of the total variation—remains unexplained after we take q^r_{it} into account. The question is whether we can improve on this using network variables.

We begin by examining the predictive power of the different network variables when one network variable is added to controls x_{it}. This is achieved by comparing the results from the model 2 regressions with model 0. Results, presented in

FIGURE 2.—SCATTER PLOTS OF FUTURE PRODUCTIVITY ON CLOSENESS CENTRALITY AND COAUTHORS' PRODUCTIVITY

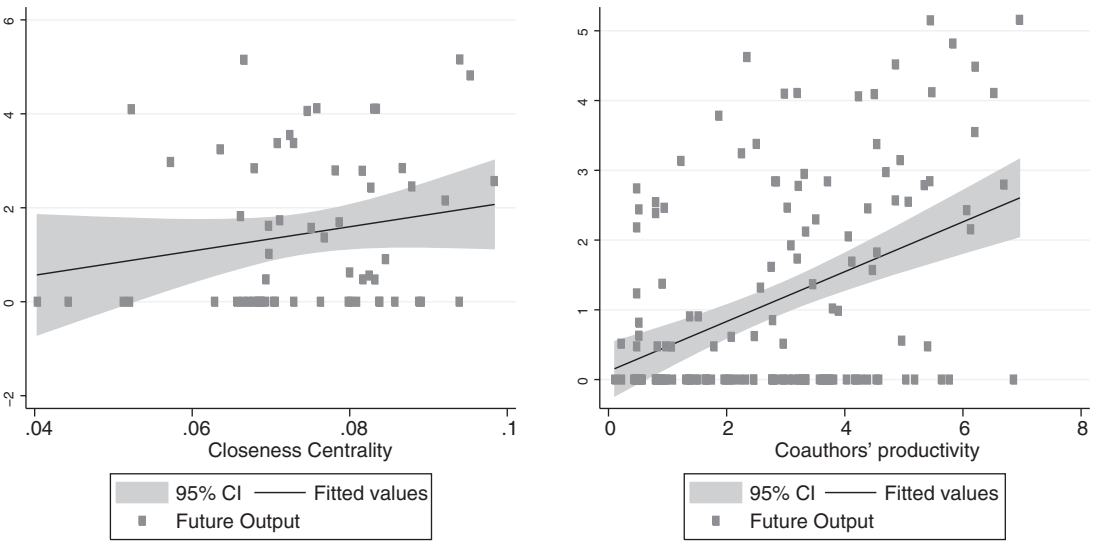


TABLE 2.—PREDICTION ACCURACY: RESTRICTED MODELS 1 AND 2

	R^2	RMSE	RMSE Differential	Coefficients
Model 0				
Past output	.28	.789	–	.22***
Model 1				
Recent past output	.49	.665	15.72%***	.49***
Model 2				
Degree	.38	.728	7.73%***	.29***
Degree of order 2	.36	.744	5.70%***	.10***
Giant component	.35	.748	5.20%***	1.05***
Closeness	.36	.743	5.83%***	22.96***
Betweenness	.38	.734	6.97%***	.11***
Coauthors' productivity	.41	.715	9.38%***	.30***
Coauthors of coauthors' productivity	.39	.727	7.86%***	.24***
Working with a top 1%	.36	.746	5.45%***	1.75***

Significant at ***1%, **5%. Model 0 includes career time dummies, year dummies, number of years since the last publication, and cumulative productivity from the first publication till $t-5$. Model 1 adds to model 0 recent output. Model 2 adds to model 0 one of the network variables. Each network variable is computed assuming that a link from a collaboration lasts during five years (five-year network variable). The number of in-sample observations is 436,440.

TABLE 3.—PREDICTION ACCURACY: RESTRICTED MODELS 1 AND 3

	R^2	RMSE	RMSE Differential	Coefficients
Model 0				
Past output	.28	.789	–	.22***
Model 1				
Recent past output	.49	.665	15.72%***	.49***
Model 3				
Degree	.50	.660	16.35%***	.09***
Degree of order 2	.50	.660	16.35%***	.03***
Giant component	.50	.662	16.10%***	.27***
Closeness	.50	.660	16.35%***	13.89***
Betweenness	.50	.657	16.73%***	.06***
Coauthors' productivity	.50	.660	16.35%***	.09***
Coauthors of coauthors' productivity	.50	.660	16.35%***	.07***
Working with a top 1%	.50	.660	16.35%***	.59***

Significant at ***1%, **5%. Model 0 includes career time dummies, year dummies, number of years since the last publication, and cumulative productivity from the first publication until $t-5$. Model 1 adds to model 0 recent output. Model 3 adds to model 1 one of the network variables. Each network variable is computed assuming that the effects from a collaboration last during five years (five-year network variable). The number of in-sample observations is 436,440.

table 2, show that coauthors' productivity q_{it}^1, closeness centrality $C_{i,t}^c$, and the productivity q_{it}^2 of coauthors of coauthors are statistically significant and help predict future output. However, the predictive power is much less than recent output, for example, coauthors' productivity reduces the RMSE by 9.38% whereas recent output reduces the RMSE by 15.72%.

We then combine recent output q_{it}^r and network variables in model 3. Results presented in table 3 show that the same network variables remain significant once we include q_{it}^r as regressor. Being significant does not imply that network variables are very informative, however. For this, we have to examine the improvement in prediction that they represent. We compare multivariate model 3, that is, with multiple network variables in the regression, to model 1. Table 4 shows that the R^2 of model 3 is greater than the R^2 obtained under model 1. This means that network information taken in combination with recent output yields a more accurate prediction than a prediction based on past output alone. The gain in explanatory power is small, however: the R^2 rises from 0.49 in model 1 to 0.51 in model 3. In line with this, the RMSE declines from 0.67 down to 0.65 when we incorporate network information. This small difference is statistically significant, as shown by the Diebold-Mariano test.

TABLE 4.—PREDICTION ACCURACY OF THE RESTRICTED MULTIVARIATE MODELS

	R^2	RMSE	RMSE Differential
Model 0	.278	.789	–
Model 1	.493	.665	15.72%***
Multivariate model 2	.433	.700	11.28%***
Multivariate model 3	.509	.654	17.11%***

Significant at ***1%. These restricted models include only five-year network variables. The number of in-sample observations is 436,440.

TABLE 5.—PREDICTION ACCURACY: UNRESTRICTED MODELS 1' AND 2'

	Lag Length	R^2	RMSE	RMSE Differential	Coefficients
Model 1'					
Recent past output	13	.39	.773	–	.44***
Model 2'					
Degree	15	.24	.861	−11.38%***	.10***
Degree of order 2	14	.23	.867	−12.16%***	.05***
Giant component	15	.23	.868	−12.29%***	.96***
Closeness	15	.24	.862	−11.51%***	1.42
Betweenness	15	.26	.849	−9.83%***	.07**
Coauthors' productivity	12	.29	.833	−7.76%***	.11***
Coauthors of coauthors' production	15	.27	.847	−9.57%***	.09***
Working with a top 1%	14	.24	.862	−11.51%***	.45***

Significant at ***1% , **5%. Model 1' includes career time dummies, year dummies, number of years since the last publication, and thirteen lags of the productivity variable. Model 2' contains career time dummies, year dummies, number of years since the last publication, and several lags of a network variable. The maximum lag length for each model is selected using the BIC. For the network variables, the maximum possible lag length considered is 15. The coefficients presented in the table correspond to the first lag of the variable. The number of in-sample observations is 667,423.

TABLE 6.—PREDICTION ACCURACY: UNRESTRICTED MODELS 1' AND 3'

	Lag Length	R^2	RMSE	RMSE Differential	Coefficients
Model 1'					
Past output	13	.39	.773	–	.44***
Model 3'					
Degree	6	.40	.768	.65%***	.14***
Degree of order 2	5	.40	.768	.65%***	.06***
Giant component	8	.40	.768	.65%***	.58***
Closeness	10	.40	.767	.78%***	2.35**
Betweenness	9	.40	.767	.78%***	.02
Coauthors' productivity	12	.41	.761	1.55%***	.09***
Coauthors of coauthors' productivity	11	.41	.764	1.16%***	.07***
Working with a top 1%	13	.40	.767	.78%***	.39***

Significant at ***1%, **5%. Model 1' includes career time dummies, year dummies, number of years since the last publication, and thirteen lags of the productivity variable. Model 3' adds to model 1' several lags of a network variable. The maximum lag length is selected using the BIC criteria. For the network variables, the maximum possible lag length considered is 15. The coefficients presented in the table correspond to the first lag of the variable. The number of in-sample observations is 667,423.

TABLE 7.—PREDICTION ACCURACY OF THE UNRESTRICTED MULTIVARIATE MODELS

	Lags	R^2	RMSE	RMSE Differential
Model 1'	13	0.395	0.773	–
Multivariate model 2'	15	0.322	0.814	−5.30%***
Multivariate model 3'	8	0.417	0.758	1.94%***

Significant at ***1%. For multivariate model 3, we consider eight lags for each network variable and thirteen lags of the output. The lag length is selected according to the BIC; for the multivariate models, we considered as candidate models only those where each network variable has the same number of lags. The number of in-sample observations is 667,423

Table 5 presents the prediction results for the benchmark unrestricted model 1' and model 2'. Model 1' contains thirteen lags of the productivity variable and the same control variables as in the restricted models except past output. Model 2' includes the control variables without past output and several lags of a network variable. Column 1 presents the lag length of each variable; the rest of the columns are analogous to table 2. The predictions obtained from the unrestricted models are consistent with their restricted versions. The network variable with the highest predictive power is coauthors' productivity with an RMSE 7.76% greater than the past output model, model 1'. Similar results obtain on the effects of networks when we compare models 1' and 3', as preported in table 6. As shown in table 7, the predictive power of network over and above information of past output is slightly higher when we consider the unrestricted version, that is, when we include several lags of the network variables. In the restricted multivariate models, the RMSE is reduced by 1.65% when we add network variables to past and recent output, while in the unrestricted version, the reduction is around 1.94%.

From this we conclude that network variables contain predictive information over and above what can be predicted on the basis of past output, but this information gain is modest.

B. Networks and Career Cycle

Next we estimate the predictive power of network variables for different career time c_{it}. The RMSE of restricted models 0, 1 and multivariate models 2 and 3 (with multiple network variables included in the regression) as well as the RMSE of unrestricted models 1' and multivariate Models 2' and 3' are plotted in Figures 3 and 5, respectively. Career age c_{it} is on the horizontal axis, while RMSE is measured on the vertical axis. Unsurprisingly, the figures show that the predictive accuracy of all the models improves (reflected in the decline in RMSE) with career time. This is primarily because the control variables x_{it}, particularly cumulative output q^c_{it}, reveal more information about individual ability and preferences over time.

To examine whether the relative predictive gain of network variables varies with career time, we report in figures 4 and 6 the difference in RMSE between multivariate models 2 and 3 versus model 1 and the difference in RMSE between their unrestricted versions, respectively. We note a marked decline in the difference between models 1' and 3' over the course of a researcher's career. After time $t = 14$,

FIGURE 3.—RMSE OUT-OF-SAMPLE ACROSS CAREER TIME: RESTRICTED MODELS

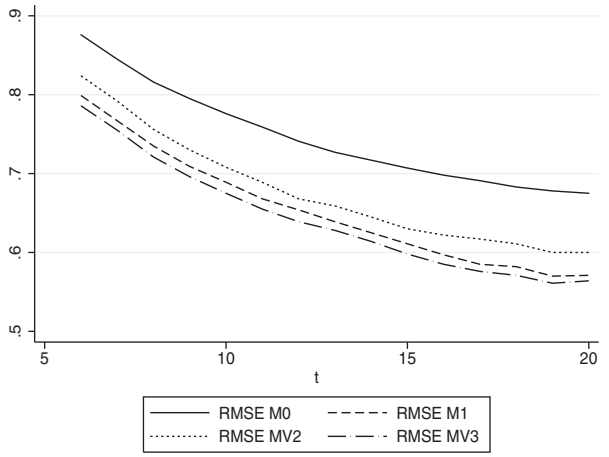
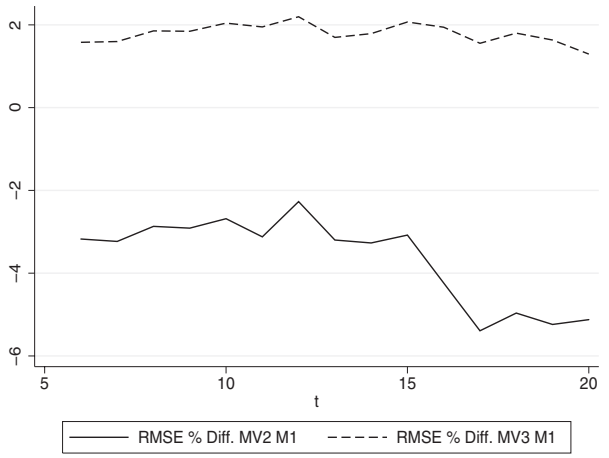


FIGURE 4.—RMSE % DIFFERENCE ACROSS CAREER TIME: RESTRICTED MODELS



According to the Diebold-Mariano test, the difference between the RMSE of multivariate model 3 and model 1 is statistically significant for every career time year.

FIGURE 5.—RMSE OUT-OF-SAMPLE ACROSS CAREER TIME: UNRESTRICTED MODELS

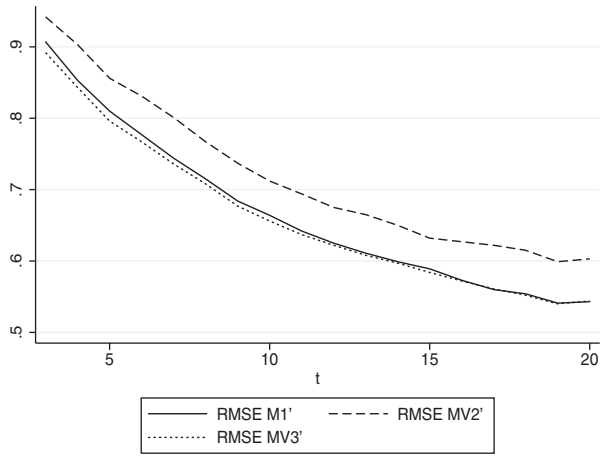
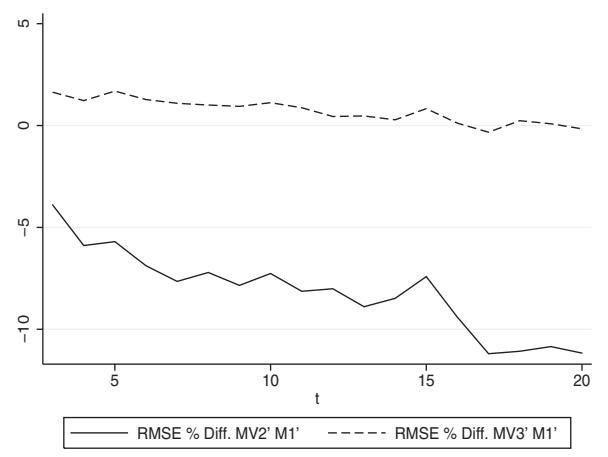


FIGURE 6.—RMSE % DIFFERENCE ACROSS CAREER TIME: UNRESTRICTED MODELS



According to the Diebold-Mariano test, the differences between the RMSE of multivariate model 3' and model 1' are insignificant for $t = 12$ and from $t = 14$ to $t = 20$.

the prediction accuracy of models with or without network variables becomes virtually indistinguishable. The Diebold-Mariano test shows that the differences between multivariate model 3' and model 1' are not statistically significant from $t = 14$ to $t = 20$. In the restricted models, figure 4, the decline in the predictive power of network variables is not observed until $t = 15$.[10] This indicates that for senior researchers, network variables contain little information over and above the information contained in past and recent output.

What does this pattern in the data suggest about the relative importance of the two potential ways in which networks may matter: flow of ideas and signaling? As time passes, the publication record of a researcher builds up. Since ability, research ambition, and other personality traits are relatively stable over time, this accumulating evidence ought to provide a more accurate estimate of the type of the person. Hence, it should become easier to judge his or her ability and research ambition on the basis of the publication record alone. Based on this, we would expect that the signaling value of networks decreases over time, and hence that network variables have less and less additional predictive power.

Research networks can, however, be important conduits of valuable research ideas as well. Unlike the signaling value of networks, access to new research ideas remains important throughout a researcher's career. Thus, if network variables help predict future output because they capture access to new ideas, their predictive value should remain relatively unchanged over a researcher's career. This is not what we observe, leaving signaling as a stronger contender as the

[10] The fact that the predictive power of networks is still significant for mature authors in the restricted model analysis might be a consequence of including inactive authors in the sample—those who do not publish regularly. As an inactive author matures, future output and network variables are both more likely to be 0 due to the reduction of output prior to retirement, so the predictive power of networks does not dissipate. Indeed, we find that if we restrict the analysis to active authors—authors with positive recent output—the predictive power of networks in the restricted model is negligible after the authors have more than fifteen years of experience.

possible channel by which network variables help predict future productivity.

C. Network Information across Productivity Categories

In this section we examine whether the predictive power of network information varies systematically with recent output q^r_{it}. This analysis is predicated on the idea that it takes talent and dedication to transform the new ideas conveyed by the research network into publishable output. Consequently, we expect the predictive power of network variables to increase with ability, and hence with q^r_{it}, at least over a certain range.

To investigate this possibility, we divided the observations into five tier groups on the basis of their recent output q^r_{it}. The top category includes authors in the top 1% in terms of q^r_{it}. The second top category includes authors in the 95–99 percentiles of q^r_{it}. The third category covers authors in the 90–94 percentiles, the fourth includes authors in the 80–89 percentiles, and the last category is for authors in the 50–79 percentiles.[11]

Figure 7 shows the RMSE % difference between models 1 and 2 versus model 0 across the different categories. The RMSE % differences are always positive because the restricted benchmark model, model 0, is nested in models 2 and 1; thus, it is very likely that models 2 and 1 have a predictive power greater than model 0. For the most productive authors, those above the 99th percentile, network variables have predictive power in explaining future research output but much less than recent output. For the next category of researchers, those in the 95–98 percentile range, network information has greater predictive power. Even more striking, for researchers in the third category, the 90–94 percentile range, network variables are better at predicting future research output than q^r_{it}! All the models have statistically significant predictive power across the different tiers.

By contrast, network information has little but significant predictive power for low-productive individuals (those in the 50–79 percentile range). This suggests that for researchers with low ability or research ambition, having published with high-quality coauthors has little informative content regarding their future output—perhaps because they are unable to take advantage of the access to information and research ideas that good coauthors provide.

Similar patterns are observed when we compare RMSE of unrestricted model 2' versus model 1'.

V. Robustness

We have conducted an extensive investigation into the robustness of our results to various assumptions made in constructing the variables used in the estimation. The results of this analysis are summarized here; the details, not shown here to save space, are available in the online appendix.

In the analysis so far, we have used accumulated productivity from $t + 1$ to $t + 3$ as the variable q_{it} we seek to predict (see equation [2]). The rationale for doing so is that the distant future is presumably harder to predict than the immediate future, and we want to give the model a fair chance. Yet in economics, there are long lags between the submission and publication of a paper and wide variation in these lags across papers and journals. Publication lags thus introduce additional variation in the variable we are trying to predict and may thus lead us to underestimate the predictive power of network information. To check whether this is affecting our results, we repeat the analysis using average future productivity over a five-year window instead of three years:

$$q^f_{it} = q_{i,t+1} + q_{i,t+2} + q_{i,t+3} + q_{i,t+4} + q_{i,t+5},$$

and, as before, we use $\ln(1+q^f_{it})$ as the variable we seek to predict. Results are similar to those reported here except that the predictive power of network variables is larger using a five-year window. In particular, network variables are even more useful than past output to forecast the future performance of a researcher, that is, multivariate model 2' outperforms model 1'.

Next we investigate whether results are sensitive to our definition of output q_{it}. We examine whether different results obtain if we correct for article length and number of coauthors. Results show that the predictive power of network variables is unaffected.[12]

Finally, the main specification used so far is a linear model estimated by OLS in which the dependent variable is a logarithmic transformation of future research output, $\ln(q^f_{it} + 1)$. We are concerned that the model might be misspecified by restricting ourselves to OLS applied to this particular functional form. We therefore repeat the analysis with nonlinear regression models frequently used to study research output or citations, such as the Poisson model, the negative binomial model, and the zero-inflated negative binomial model. Results show that the in-sample log likelihood is higher for the (zero-inflated) negative binomial model than for the linear model applied to the $\ln(y + 1)$-transformation. However the out-of-sample RMSE is lowest for the linear model. As the linear model is also easy to interpret and evaluate, we use it as our main specification.

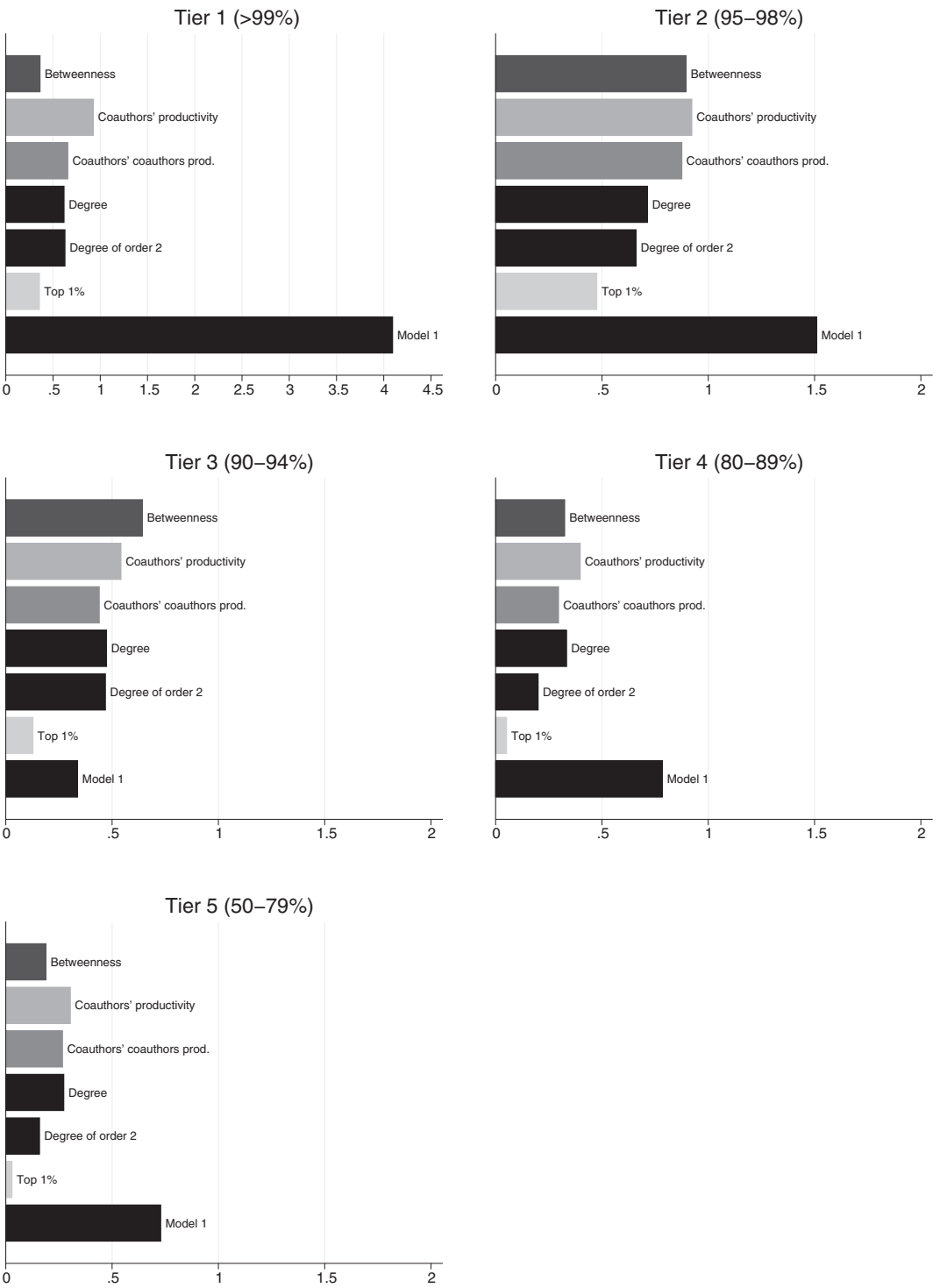
We also consider panel data models. Fixed-effect models are not useful to predict the productivity of junior researchers so we do not pursue them further.[13] We also investigate the predictive power of vector autoregressive (VARs) models where past network variables affect future output and past output influences future network variables. We estimate such

[11] We do not consider authors below the median because the median recent output is 0.

[12] See the online appendix for more details.

[13] Results from panel data regressions are available in the online appendix.

FIGURE 7.—RMSE % DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RESTRICTED MODELS ACROSS PRODUCTIVITY TIERS



VAR models using a seemingly unrelated regressions (SUR) approach, allowing for correlation in the error terms across the two equations. The lag length of each equation is selected using the BIC criteria. The SUR regressions should in principle lead to more efficient predictions as long as the two equations do not include the same set of lagged variables, a conditions that is fulfilled here. Results show that the predictions generated by the unrestricted SUR model 3 using feasible generalized least squares (FGLS) hardly differ from the unrestricted model 3 estimated using simple OLS. Therefore, the SUR model does not outperform, out of sample, the simple OLS.

VI. Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined whether a researcher's coauthor network helps predict their future output. Underlying our study are two main ideas. The first idea is that a collaboration resulting in a published article reveals valuable information about an author's ability and research ambitions. This is particularly true for junior researchers whose type cannot be fully assessed from their cumulative output. The second idea is that professional research networks provide access to new research ideas. These ideas can subsequently be turned into published papers provided the researcher possesses the necessary ability and dedication.

To investigate these ideas, we examine coauthorship in economics. Our focus is not on statistical significance or causality but rather on predictive power. For this reason, we adopt a methodology that eliminates data mining and minimizes the risk of pretesting bias. To this effect, we randomly divide the data into two halves. Parameter estimates are obtained with one-half and predictions are judged by how well they perform in the other half of the sample.

We find that information about someone's coauthor networks leads to a modest improvement in the forecast accuracy of their future output over and above what can be predicted from their past output. The network variables that have the most information content are the productivity of coauthors, closeness centrality, and the number of past coauthors. These results are robust to alternative specifications and variable definitions.

We investigate whether the predictive power of network variables is stronger for more talented researchers, as would be the case if taking advantage of new ideas requires talent and dedication. We find that the predictive value of network variables is nonmonotonic with respect to past productivity. Network variables do not predict the future productivity of individuals with below-average initial productivity. They are somewhat informative for individuals in the highest past productivity tier group. But they are most informative about individuals in between. In fact, for these individuals, networks contain more information about their future productivity than recent research output.

The work presented here leaves many questions unanswered. In particular, we do not claim to have identified a causal effect of coauthorship or network quality on future output. If anything, the signaling hypothesis is based on a reverse causality argument, and it receives the most support from our analysis. However, we also find evidence that network connections are most useful to talented researchers. This result is consistent with a causal relationship between the flow of research ideas and future output, with the caveat that talent is needed to turn ideas into publishable papers.

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