Altmetrics

In the previous post, we looked at the time-honoured tradition of using bibliometrics to measure research output and impact. Now, let’s take a look at a new kid on the block.

Alternative resources and alternative data...

Altmetrics, or alternative metrics, study resources and data that owe their existence primarily to the online environment. Alternative resources include material such as online research blogs, datasets, or software. Such outputs are an increasingly important aspect of sharing of research. Online-specific data have only relatively recently become available and include data such as numbers of tweets, clicks, or downloads. These data offer alternatives to citation data for the quantitative assessment of research.

A new but fast moving field...

Altmetrics, although still in its infancy, is attracting a lot of interest as a potentially useful way to measure research outputs. Because altmetrics cover such a wide range of types of resources and data, they can be used to examine not just the academic impact of research but also its societal impact.

At present, perhaps the biggest two stumbling blocks for altmetrics are the lack of standardisation across online resources and data—and hence, in practice, little ability to normalise metrics—and the ease with which altmetric results can be gamed. Nonetheless, even if altmetrics aren’t yet suitable for formal studies comparable to those we carry out using bibliometrics, altmetrics certainly have their uses for the individual academic; REF impact case studies provide a good example.

Altmetric tools...

There are many tools online for the creation and capture of altmetrics. ImpactStory and altmetric.com both aggregate altmetric information to allow you to study the academic and societal impact of research. Research networks such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu are aimed primarily at helping researchers create academic impact through sharing their research with others in the research community. And, of course, don’t forget non-academic-centric social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Used in the right way, these channels can be highly effective ways to share your research, both with academic colleagues and wider society. See this excellent A to Z of Social Media for Academia for a whole range of further options.

Try it yourself...

1) Explore this example ImpactStory profile.

- What types of alternative resources does ImpactStory aggregate?
- Are any of these alternative resources especially important in your research field? If not, do you think they might be in future?
2) Visit altmetric.com to learn more about the company’s distinctive altmetric donut. A key feature of this donut is the 'click for more details' option which allows you to retrieve specific details such as who said what about the article as well as where it is capturing interest.

If you wish, open Chrome, Firefox, or Safari and follow the instructions to install the altmetric bookmarklet app. Now test the app by visiting the Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics, a recent comment article published in Nature. Now click on 'altmetric it!' If your installation has worked, you should see the altmetric donut appear in the top right-hand corner of the screen. At time of writing this blog, the Leiden Manifesto article has no citations in Scopus and does not even appear in Web of Science, seeming to suggest it has had little post publication impact. How does the picture presented by the article’s altmetrics differ?

3) Research from Elsevier suggests that 65% of academics are on LinkedIn. Have a look at this blog post on how to create an effective academic LinkedIn profile.