The role of the library in supporting open and connected research and researchers

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Where are we today?

Researchers and institutions are facing increasing pressures, from funders and other stakeholders, to make their work openly available and engage with a broader audience. In the last 20 years the role of the library has changed dramatically - from a place of reference to a one-stop shop for a variety of services, support and access to materials, several of which are often offered on a remote basis.

How can libraries and librarians best leverage the tools and data now available to help their faculty and institution:

- Comply with funder mandates
- Gain visiblity for their work
- Demonstrate their expertise
- Attract new funding
- Identify appropriate collaborators
- Make informed publication decisions
- Improve their teaching
- Align activities and efforts with strategic goals

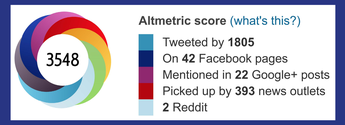
What data is out there?

Traditionally, those involved in producing scholarly work have relied on anecdotal evidence and traditional bibliometrics, such as citation counts, to monitor the impacts of published research. In recent years, however, new data and tools have become available which provide a much bigger insight into the engagement and reach of research beyond the academic community - altmetrics.

Altmetrics are data sourced from the social web that provide a real-time record of the online conversations and shares relating to individual research outputs, including thins like mentions in the mainstream media, references in public policy documents, and comments on social networks. They bring huge benefits:

- they're immediate - so no waiting months for citations to accrue
- they can be used for outputs beyond just journal articles - providing valuable feedback for authors publishing in disciplines for whom the article is not the primary output of choice
- they capture and reflect attention from a much broader audience - not just amongst academics

One example of altmetrics is the data provided by Altmetric.com - which uses a 'donut' visualisation and weighted Attention Score to indicate how much and what type of attention an item has received. A key part of altmetrics is the qualitiative data they offer - clicking on the 'donut' takes you through to the Altmetric details page - a collated record of all of the original mentions and shares, so you can see who is saying what, and where they are:



How can we use it?

Altmetrics can often be found via publisher article pages, or you may have access to a platform like the Altmetric Explorer for Institutions.

There are lots of different ways you can use the data as librarians, and researchers can benefit from it too:

Uses in the library

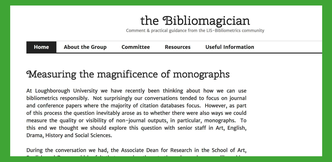
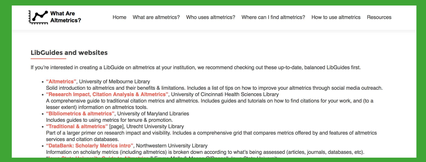
- Providing feedback to researchers: when offering data for indivudual publications to support grant applications or other official documentation, why not also share the altmetrics for the item?
- Making collection development decisions: use altmetrics to see which content is really having a broader impact, or what might be missing from your portfolio.
- Identifying where support is needed: are there researchers who are doing good work but not achieving the visibility it or they deserve? take a look at their altmetrics and those of other work in their field to help them build effective strategies for growing their profile.
- Mesuring the impact of OA policies: according to preliminary research, work that is openly available tends to be shared and discussed online more often. Encourage your researchers to make theirs Open Access by showing them the tangible results of doing so.

Uses for researchers

- Finding evidence of broader reach: altmetrics provide real-time feed back, meaning even if something has only just been published it may be possible to find examples of engagement to show to management, dunders, or other stakeholders.
- Managing professional reputation: keeping an eye on what people are saying about you or your work is important for effectively managing your professional reputation, but it can be time-consuming. Altmetrics are useful because they collate the conversations in one place, making it easy to check and see what's being said, and showing you who to engage with if necessary.
- Tracking trends and identifying potential collaborators: want to expand your network and see what's happening in your field? Altmetrics can be used to monitor what's changing and uncover emerging researchers in specific disciplines, enabling you to forge new connections and ensure your work is relevant.

Get started

There are lots of ways you can get started with altmetrics! You might want to take a look at the reporting your department currently does to see where such data could provide useful additional context, or work with a specific researcher to explore the online coversations and activity relating to their work.

Ensuring your faculty have a good understanding of all these new indicators is becoming increasingly important. Including information on altmetrics in bibliometric workshops, during presentations in faculty meetings or as part of induction programs can be a good way of doing this.

There are lots of online resources you can use, including CC-BY lib-guides that can help you populate content for your library site to offer guidance, and many blogs that also share the latest news.