

Altmetrics: how librarians can support researchers in improving their impact

Valeria Scotti

Scientific Documentation Service
Fondazione IRCCS Policlinico San Matteo, Pavia, Italy

Abstract

In the last year, the development of tools even more web 2.0 oriented has profoundly changed the scientific communication process. Many web tools have emerged including the so-called social media and social network. From here the need for new indicators to measure the influence of these tools on the scientific community and the emergence of alternative metrics. Altmetrics combines the traditional bibliometrics tool with the use of the web. Aim of the workshop was to show how a librarian can support researchers in improving their impact on the society and on the academic world, using alternative metric tools.

Key words: altmetrics; alternative metrics; bibliometrics; librarian role.

Introduction

This half-block session held at the Edinburgh EAHIL workshop was entitled *Altmetrics: how librarians can support researchers in improving their impact*. With my great surprise, it was fully booked with 25 participants and I would like to thank the session participants for their attention. The idea behind this workshop was to introduce the Alternative Metrics concept and how librarians can use this new metrics in their daily work with researchers (*Figure 1*). I proposed this topic to the



Figure 1. *Altmetrics Workshop*.

EAHIL survey on November and it was accepted by the International Programme Committee for the joint EAHIL+ICAHIS+ICLC 2015 Workshop.

The goal of biomedical research is to make a difference in people's life. Patients and the whole society are in fact key stakeholders in research issues and should be involved in setting the health research agenda, assessing whether research results are important. To "measure" how the public perceives and understand biomedical research is a very complex issue; however, Altmetrics can be a valid tool. For this reason, I am interested in showing from a practical perspective – that is, using alternative metric tools – how librarians can support researchers in improving their impact on academy and society.

Statistics, Bibliometrics and Altmetrics are increasingly on a scientific library's agenda. In an era of resources rationalization, these parameters become a valuable ally to decision making. But they also become indispensable tools for assessing and quantifying our daily work, as Bibliometric indices are increasingly called upon to evaluate the work and impact of researchers.

Address for correspondence: Valeria Scotti, Scientific Documentation Service, Fondazione IRCCS Policlinico San Matteo, Piazzale Golgi, 19 27100 Pavia, Italy. E-mail: v.scotti@smatteo.pv.it

What is Altmetrics?

The term “Altmetrics” is short for “Alternative Metrics” or “Article Levels Metrics”. These are a range of nontraditional metrics that can be used to assess the impact that scholars have on research in their areas of study. They can include the number of article downloads, citation of research in online news/social media sources, bookmarks and nontraditional forms of scholarship. This is a great opportunity for younger scientists who do not have many publications in their portfolio.

Altmetrics and librarians

In the last five years, Altmetrics has taken its place alongside well known terms such as H-index or Impact Factor. Understanding and learning these new indices opens the way to a more and more web 2.0 oriented library, able to interact with social networks and the wider society. Alternative metrics are aimed at measuring the societal impact of scientific production, and include data obtained from the WWW. There are a number of alternative metrics, the main ones being PlumAnalytics, ImpactStory, Altmetrics.com. Aside from individual differences in the calculation algorithms and output metrics, they all basically aggregate data from social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Mendeley, Cross-Ref, ResearchGate, Slideshare and many others (sometimes also including data from newspapers, blogs, forums and news sites) (Figure 2). I was interested in showing from a practical perspective how librarians can support researchers in improving their impact the academic world (and society as a whole), using alternative metric tools.

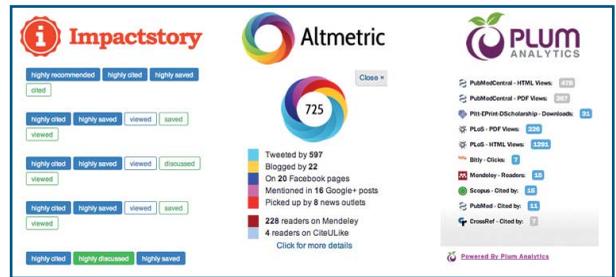


Figure 2. The major portals that aggregate Altmetrics data (<http://www.wellesley.edu/sites/default/files/altmetrics-ris.png>).

My personal intent with this workshop was to give an overview of the main bibliometric tools, their calculation, their practical application and their relative strengths and limitations.

Conclusions

In my opinion, the task of the librarians should be first of all learning, training and updating their own skills in order to validly support both researchers and institutions. Therefore, a pivotal role for us librarians is being able to transfer knowledge to researchers and institutions, in order to take an active part in these changes. Especially for the next generation of users: digital natives!

During the conference's day I spoke with Alicia Fátima Gómez-Sánchez, session leader of the course *Bibliometrics for Information Specialists: Supporting Biomedical Research and Evaluation*. We agreed on the need for greater discussion on bibliometrics' themes inside EAHIL, for which the next conference in Seville would be a great starting point.