Tracking the Scholarly Conversation in Health Professions Education: An Introduction to Altmetrics

What are altmetrics? Altmetrics are article-level metrics that measure the attention to and dissemination of an article on nontraditional outlets such as social media sites (e.g., Twitter and Facebook), weblogs, and online tools (e.g., Mendeley). Altmetrics complement citation-based impact metrics such as impact factor. Compared with traditional, citation-based metrics, which take time to accrue, altmetrics provide timely feedback on the distribution of an article and the discourse that surrounds it.

What are altmetrics outlets? Several companies provide altmetrics services, including Altmetric LLC and Plum Analytics. Each company tracks a slightly different combination of outlets and provides an “altmetrics count” using proprietary formulas. The list below provides the most common outlets tracked by such companies.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>Google+</th>
<th>Open Syllabus Project</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1000</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>Wikipedia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Mendeley</td>
<td>Policy documents</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FigShare</td>
<td>News Outlet</td>
<td>Reddit</td>
<td>Weibo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How are Altmetric LLC Attention Scores calculated? A composite score, known as the Altmetric Attention Score, is presented within a colorful donut (right); it represents the outlets that are tracked by Altmetric LLC, with a different color for each outlet.2 The total score, displayed in the center of the donut, is a weighted total of the outlets and how often an article has been featured in that outlet. Imagine your article was published on a Friday and immediately 2 people tweeted about it, and then, collectively, 16 of their followers retweeted the original tweet about your article. Finally, on the following Tuesday, 3 authors referenced your article in their blogs. Each of these actions influences your article’s Attention Score, and in the case of Altmetric LLC, each action shows up as a corresponding color in the donut. Your article’s Attention Score and donut colors will continue to change as the article gets more attention from a variety of outlets.

Why do altmetrics matter? Altmetrics provide a real-time measure of how an article is distributed and consumed in nontraditional outlets. Altmetrics are useful to individual researchers, institutions, and journals because they:

1. Provide immediate feedback on published scholarly work
2. Are freely available and accessible
3. Capture the multidisciplinary attention an article is attaining
4. Represent impact across a variety of media
5. Indicate to readers articles that are “trending” or are popular
6. Provide a benchmark for comparing one article’s attention with that of another3

References:

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Department of Defense, or U.S. Government.

Author contact: holly.meyer.ctr@usuhs.edu; Twitter: @hollysmeyer (H.S.M.); @meodeddoc (A.R.A. Jr); @laurenmaggio (L.A.M.)