

Transcript: Article metrics: what do they mean and what do you need to know, as a researcher?

In the past few years it has become possible for authors, institutions and funders to assess the reach of individual journal articles. We are no longer required to use Impact Factors or other journal level metrics to evaluate published research. Instead, each article can be evaluated on its own merits, and not on the company it keeps.

The most widely used article level metrics are citations. They are a very active and public form of engagement within the scholarly community, understood by all. Article level citations can be found on publisher platforms, Google Scholar and sources such as Web of Science – although each database will give a different figure their coverage of citing material is different. Article level citations allow us to calculate things like H-indexes or other author metrics.

Downloads are becoming more widely displayed by publishers, including on Taylor & Francis Online, and give a different measure of article usage. Some of this is popularity – research on sport and dinosaurs often does very well - or tapping into the zeitgeist.

Altmetrics is the general term for measuring activity associated with a piece of academic work. Initially this started as measuring Twitter and social media mentions but it has since grown to include citations on Wikipedia, saves in Mendeley libraries, or coverage in government policy papers. Altmetrics have effectively broadening what impact can look like.

Saying in isolation that an article has been tweeted by 500 might not mean much, but what does it mean when you combine it with being picked up in a national newspaper, several citations, and a high number of downloads? That your research was used by people both within your field, and was also picked up beyond it.

Article level metrics, and in particular altmetrics, need to be considered as more than just a number – what can this tell me about my work and what did people find interesting?

Also, like all metrics, they need to be considered in the context of what you publish. Just as with citations and Impact Factors, different subjects and research types have very different download patterns, so they have very different altmetrics.

Article level metrics are there for you – so you know more about your own work, and to help you select what to read in the future.

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