

A Review of Open Data Metrics Research: Altmetrics for Measuring Online User Behavior and Scientific Community Impact

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Abstract

This study briefly introduces the advantages of Altmetrics in leveraging social network usage data to recommend ranking orders for information retrieval and transforming academic evaluation methods alongside other impact metrics. Through case observation and analysis, it delineates the open data framework of Altmetrics.com, particularly its professional services for article-level metrics. The study further focuses on analyzing two core articles that can enhance empirical testing methodologies to formulate a concise and actionable workflow, and discusses new knowledge service initiatives for libraries, including open storage, open publishing support, and novel embedded information services within research teams.

Full Text

Preamble

Copyright Notice: Copyright © *Modern Library and Information Technology*. Downloads and citations welcome! Please cite as: Ku Liping. Review of Open Data Metric Studies: An Alternative Metric (Altmetrics) for Calculating Online User Behavior and Scientific Community Impact [J]. *Modern Library and Information Technology*, 2013(6): 1-8.

Abstract: This paper introduces the advantages of Altmetrics in using social network usage data to recommend information retrieval ranking orders and in transforming academic evaluation approaches alongside other impact indicators. Through case observation and analysis, it delineates the open data framework of Altmetrics.com, particularly its specialized services for article-level metrics. Focusing on two core articles that can enhance empirical validation methods, the paper formulates a concise, operational workflow. It also discusses new

knowledge service issues for libraries, including support for open repositories, open publishing, and new information services embedded in research teams.

Keywords: Alternative metrics; Impact measurement; Usage network; Citation network; Social network; Open research data; Article-level metrics

Classification Number: G250

1 Characteristics and Advantages of Altmetrics

1.1 Changes in Scholarly Communication Systems and the Advantages of Altmetrics

The scientific information exchange system has progressed toward open access, open knowledge, and open innovation, posing higher demands and challenges for knowledge services. The new open knowledge service model (Open Knowledge Services) includes: transforming libraries into platforms that support user innovation, as well as discovering, selecting, integrating, and providing open resources, open analytical tools, personalized organization and management, and policy integration planning to develop libraries into open public knowledge service innovation platforms. Therefore, libraries need to actively master various analysis and selection tools and implement various practices for participating in open science.

Because open resource tools support coordinated collaboration among different users, they provide new opportunities for practitioners in research and education. How to deeply understand technology, how to apply technology to solve policy problems, and how to use policy to guide the healthy development of open science are all new challenges of this era. In this context, Altmetrics provides another perspective for calculating network user behavior and observing academic community influence, and its mechanisms warrant in-depth study.

Recently, an open data metric service called Altmetrics has been quietly emerging. Its alias, Alternative Metrics, may be translated as “alternative metrics” or “substitute metrics.” Piwowar [2] summarizes its four potential advantages: (1) providing more nuanced impact analysis, where academic outputs such as reading, discussion, storage, and commentary can all be counted, similar to citation data; (2) providing real-time updated data that can assess impact on a daily rather than yearly basis; (3) measuring the impact of academic outputs on general internet users, such as datasets, software, blogs, videos, etc.; and (4) being influenced by various audiences, including scholars, practitioners, clinicians, educators, and the general public.

Altmetrics.org [3] displays four different measurement methods, as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

1.2 Characteristics of Altmetrics

Unlike traditional citation metrics (Citation Metrics) for evaluating research outcomes, Altmetrics possesses broader peer review characteristics. It treats user behaviors on social media, social tagging, social networks, and community websites—including browsing, downloading, commenting, indexing, and annotation—as computable user usage data (User Usage Data). Neylon et al. [6] argue that Article-Level Metrics (ALMs) can provide specific items and the latest news from different types of academic impacts, helping researchers filter information to find relevant research more quickly and easily. This new scholarly communication model is also supported by Altmetrics.

From the perspective of research value measurement, scholarly communication expressions are becoming increasingly diverse. Priem et al. [7] believe Altmetrics can organize open data and present intuitive visualizations: (1) sharing datasets, code, and experimental designs as “Raw Science”; (2) publishing parameters or semantic content rather than entire articles; and (3) annotating existing work through blogs, microblogs, and comments.

This paper analyzes the data model framework of Altmetrics and, building upon previous work on patent ranking algorithms [8] and knowledge element libraries [9], examines its computational principles through literature review. Based on the data model and computational principles, it reviews the latest literature on Altmetrics and briefly summarizes operational workflows for libraries to apply Altmetrics in implementing open access, open knowledge, and open innovation intelligence services.

2 The Open Data Model of Altmetrics

In the new scholarly communication system, peer review encompasses not only published journal articles but also, in a broader sense, pre-publication and post-publication processes. For example, services like arXiv.org, as open storage systems supporting open scholarly communication and open academic publishing, have extensive influence in physics, mathematics, computer science, quantitative biology, statistics, and other fields [4].

Because open resource tools support different users in coordinated collaboration, they provide new opportunities for practitioners in research and education. How to deeply understand technology, how to apply technology to solve policy problems, and how to use policy to guide the healthy development of open science are all new challenges of this era [5]. In this context, Altmetrics provides another perspective for calculating network user behavior and observing academic community influence, and its mechanisms warrant in-depth study.

2.1 Open Data Storage and Interfaces for Social Network Data

Altmetrics can calculate various social software network user behaviors for papers, websites, blogs, datasets, grey literature, software, etc. Konkiel [11] indicates that viewing, downloading (e.g., from PubMed, CrossRef, Scopus, Wikipedia, DOI, Web of Science), reusing (e.g., GitHub), sharing (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), indexing (e.g., Mendeley, CiteULike, Delicious), and commenting (e.g., Twitter, Mendeley, blogs, publisher websites, Wikipedia) can all be calculated by Altmetrics. Therefore, its operational mechanism primarily relies on open data provided by social software.

All external APIs entering the Altmetrics database are controlled by IP. Users with special applications or long-term large-scale data transmission needs, as well as institutions using mash-up or application programming interfaces, can apply for parameter names. After application, they receive a key [12], such as: “<http://api.altmetric.com/v1/id/241939?key=xxx>” .

2.2 System Interoperability of Open Data

If the analysis focuses on a single paper, a specific set of machine-readable identifiers must be used to determine the valid referent object for that paper or dataset. Altmetrics provides five common universal ID parameters [13-17], summarized in Table 1 . Querying one theoretically yields the other four simultaneously.

Table 1: Five ID Parameters in Altmetrics

Common Data Center	Example in Altmetrics
Altmetrics Article ID [13]	http://api.altmetric.com/v1/id/
DOI [14]	http://api.altmetric.com/v1/doi/10.1038/news.2011.490
PubMed ID [15]	http://api.altmetric.com/v1/pmid/
arXiv ID [16]	http://api.altmetric.com/v1/arxiv/1108.2455
ADS Bibcode [17]	http://api.altmetric.com/v1/ads/2012apphl.100y3104b

In the Altmetrics database, the system automatically generates a unique identifier called the Altmetric Article ID, which identifies the referent object (Object), such as a specific article number. Since data is transmitted to obtain open data from open storage like DataCite, PubMed, and arXiv.org, Altmetrics maps various IDs to the Altmetric ID for unified knowledge base (Unified Knowledge Base) management.

Based on ID parameters, one can obtain response objects and other parameters for articles or datasets. The parameters include four main data architectures: identifier type, identifier, include_sources, and include_sections [18]. Altmetrics distinguishes quotes, citations, scores, statistics, and text messages at the include_sections level, fully leveraging computability and open data characteristics. In fact, the actual content at this include_sections level is the specific

information of the response object and is key to studying the Altmetrics data model. The author has compiled this as shown in Table 2 [19,20].

Table 2: Details of Open Data for ALMs

Data Category	Description
altmetric_id	The identifier and referent object number in Altmetrics, with the other four serving as conversion standards.
counts	Borrowing from PubMed' s data model, including: unique identifier for versions (unique_ips), total full-text count (full_text), PDF downloads (pdf), abstract reads (abstract), and timeliness checked monthly (timeline).
selected_quotes	Other open data can come from: Twitter, Facebook, Google, blogs, news, Pinterest, Reddit, Q&A, comments, misc (any available form).
citation	Borrowing from DataCite' s data model, including: time frame, pages, articles per page, citation counts (from Facebook, blogs, Twitter, Reddit, news, F1000, etc.), DOI prefix, journal code symbols (nlmid), and journal discipline (subject).
altmetric_score	Current score (score), score history by time period (score_history), and context for score in Altmetrics database (context_for_score).
demographics	Public not in the circle, relevant researchers, clinical science researchers, science communicators.
posts	Partially borrowing from NISO' s data model, including: title, summary (actually first paragraph), URL, creation date (posted_on), and author profile.

Notably, the details in the context_for_score item within altmetric_score are

important because the data end users ultimately see directly from the API comes primarily from `altmetric_score` components, and its mixed calculations are relatively complex. For easier understanding, the author divides it into two categories: (1) data calculation (all) - statistics in the Altmetrics database, including `mean`, `sample_size`, `split` (first condition is highest score in dataset, second is highest in top 90%, third is top 80%, etc.), number of articles scoring same or lower (`this_scored_higher_than`), and percentage ranking (`this_scored_higher_than_pct`); and (2) journal calculation - three types: statistics for all papers in this journal (`this_journal`), statistics for related papers in same journal within 6 weeks (`similar_age_this_journal_3m`), and statistics for related papers in any journal within 6 weeks (`similar_age_3m`).

The first type uses all paper data in the database for ALMs calculation for a single paper, while the second uses journal-related data for JLMs-ALMs calculation. Distinguishing these calculations helps understand Altmetrics' computational principles. For general readers browsing papers, the first represents Altmetrics' distinctive recommendation service. However, for disciplinary experts reading highly specialized theoretical articles, calculations using journal group data better reflect an article' s value within the academic community. Moreover, obtaining the second type of data allows comparison between "JLMs based on ALMs" and "general JLMs," such as comparing traditional abstract database-based journal impact factors with Altmetrics-based journal influence.

3 Empirical Methods for Testing Altmetrics

3.1 Empirical Validation Approach

Lin et al. [21] argue that Article-Level Metrics (ALMs) differ significantly from Journal-Level Metrics (JLMs) in three aspects: different audiences (public and scholars often focus on different aspects), different dimensions (influence, attention, self-improvement), and different time nodes (journal evaluation uses annual units while Altmetrics can calculate to months and days). These characteristics enable Altmetrics to assist ALMs in more "detailed" and "precise" calculations.

The entire validation process can be divided into: differences or convergence between social network metrics and journal citation metrics, and differences or convergence between open repository downloads and open annotation evaluations. Literature [22] examines this from the JLMs perspective, while literature [23] approaches it from the ALMs perspective. This paper merges and simplifies these approaches as detailed below.

3.2 Convergence Validation of Metrics

Bollen et al. [22] collected open data from different data centers, primarily including journal citation data, citation networks, and usage log data. Based on

39 scientific impact indicators, they established four measurement categories: citation networks, ranking algorithms, usage networks, and social networks. Comparing indicators against indicators using Spearman's rank correlation R matrix produces a correlation matrix (39×39). Principal Component Analysis (PCA) generates a hierarchical cluster analysis (HCA) diagram and proportion of variance. After PCA, suitable clusters are identified on the HCA diagram using the Pareto Principle (the “80/20 rule”). Finally, marking the corresponding positions of the 39 indicators on a new coordinate map yields the clusters.

Bollen et al.' s [22] research empirically demonstrates the convergence of journal citation data and user usage data—rankings based on usage data and those based on citation data trend in the same direction. Both the first and second central points include indicators with PageRank as a core method, enabling development of more accurate literature relevance recommendations or academic contribution rankings.

3.3 Temporal Divergence Validation

If both journal citation metrics and user behavior metrics produce consistent or similar evaluation results for journals composed of high-quality, high-impact papers, then whether traditional usage statistics (views, downloads, clicks) and new usage statistics (tagging, commenting, annotation) converge becomes key. Additionally, the “time node” difference between ALMs and JLMs importantly affects ranking results.

Shuai et al. [23] obtained two distinct types of open data from arXiv.org and Twitter: download counts on arXiv.org and mention counts on Twitter after article publication. The time from submission to peak download/mention represents the delayed attention period, while the time from submission through peak to gradual decline represents the total span. Three functions are formed: Twitter mention counts, arXiv.org download counts, and days from publication to analysis date. Three multiple linear regression models are established based on these functions, and standard errors are compared to select optimal correlation for Pearson correlation coefficient R measurement.

Shuai et al.' s [23] research intuitively demonstrates the convergence of open repository downloads and open annotation evaluations—showing how attention increases and decreases over time, and how two types of usage statistics trend in the same direction temporally.

3.4 Unconsidered Situations in Validation Models

Discontinued journals, scattered journals, merged journals, individual papers, and individual paper chapters are not considered in this validation model. However, due to ALMs characteristics, these “exceptional” cases cannot be excluded from statistical analysis because Altmetrics performs various numerical presentations and recommendation services for them. Currently, for simplification, the discussion focuses on citation networks versus usage networks and traditional

versus new usage statistics; unaddressed portions should be incorporated into future calculations.

4 Discussion on Library Applications of Altmetrics

4.1 Impact on Library Service Objects

Alperin [24] argues that for developing countries, where economic, political, and technical conditions differ from North America and Europe, societal issues requiring academic community attention also differ. Altmetrics can provide a platform that appropriately balances public needs and academic contributions. Within academic circles, academic qualifications have traditionally emphasized journal articles or monographs, with some patents, projects, or conference presentations. Piwowar et al. [25] identify ten impacts of Altmetrics on scholar CVs: (1) providing information beyond traditional academic resumes; (2) reducing inappropriate measurement standards; (3) revealing work published merely for publication's sake; (4) legitimizing all types of academic products; (5) recognizing various impact preferences (different audience perspectives); (6) rewarding substantive efforts that enable reuse by others; (7) encouraging public participation; (8) facilitating qualitative exploration (traditional "quantitative" metrics poorly suit qualitative research, but publishing qualitative research content can now generate extensive quantitative usage statistics through Altmetrics); (9) strengthening multiple selection options for research output dissemination; and (10) stimulating innovation in research evaluation.

Scholarly personal profiles are no longer static publication lists on webpages but constantly updated "academic contributions" including citation and usage data composite scores. Additionally, through recommendation mechanisms like Facebook and Twitter, scholars can automatically organize virtual research communities interested in the same topics. Altmetrics-based scholar profiles are gradually becoming a method for job applications, promotion, and establishing academic status, enabling librarians to use such data or analytical methods for in-depth disciplinary services and consulting work for scholar-expert users on how to use and enhance Altmetrics services.

4.2 Impact on Library Selection of Open Access Journals

Open access and Altmetrics share common goals. Since open access journals are more easily used by more people, they are cited more frequently. However, literature usage extends beyond reference list annotations to include linking, commenting, citing, discussing, saving, and other interactions. Mounce [26] argues that Altmetrics, capable of instant peer review, can provide positive benefits for open access journals, such as obtaining large amounts of evaluation data from non-scientists and making post-publication information filtering easier and more accurate.

Traditional academic evaluation methods calculate journal citations within 2-5 years based on reference lists in print journal papers, then rank journals by citation values to form a basis for scholars' submission decisions and academic quality rankings. This "self-contained" theory risks tautological reasoning. The openness of open access journal content includes different levels: searchable, accessible, usable, and computable. Altmetrics does not reference citation data from previous years' journal papers but synthesizes various usage situations including the present moment. This breaks free from the tautological logic of traditional evaluation models and presents a more complete academic quality assessment mechanism. Since evaluation results constantly change, academic evaluation becomes dynamic rather than static, better aligning with open access journal characteristics that can be used anytime and reflect usage immediately. Therefore, when supporting open access journal development, the library community must consider using Altmetrics or similar methods for journal evaluation and selection.

4.3 Impact on Library Development of Open Knowledge Repositories

For institutional repositories, Altmetrics as an online activity value indicator can bring more development opportunities, expanding advantages in searching, browsing, social media, audience tagging, and data reuse. Moreover, institutional repository contributions to academic circles are not about ranking or comparison but re-examining resource relevance, promoting retrieval efficiency, and broader content usage. Konkiel et al. [27] believe its value to authors includes: (1) helping authors better understand how readers use open access content; (2) supplementing journal impact factors to help authors document their research influence; (3) enabling repository managers to persuade non-contributors to share content openly; (4) providing data beyond usage statistics to demonstrate platform value for open access content and communicate better with repository funders; (5) supplementing usage statistics to help develop collection plans, resource allocation, and promotion; (6) allowing administrators to demonstrate institutional academic impact to internal and external stakeholders; and (7) helping professional review committees (for titles, tenure, awards, etc.) understand researchers' actual acceptance by academic communities.

Since papers deposited in open repositories can be utilized and disseminated to the greatest extent without database integrator control, developing Altmetrics-like functions or directly using certain methods can enhance retrieval effectiveness, statistics, recommendation functions, and usage dimensions of deposited content. Therefore, libraries can advise researchers and educators to place papers or research data in open institutional repositories, bringing broader academic and social contributions.

4.4 Impact on Library Intelligence Analysis Services

Since the 1960s, citation counts have served as the standard for judging academic contribution and quality status. However, increasing problems with citation

analysis (limited timeliness, self-citation, clique citation, excessive emphasis, and incomplete reflection of usage) contrast sharply with Altmetrics (which can calculate social media, social networks, community websites, social tagging, blog forums, library circulation, Twitter, etc.).

Currently, Altmetrics is influencing the direction of academic evaluation development, but its innovations and reforms also create some ambiguous areas. Buschman et al. [28] raise these issues: traditional journal papers are too narrow; network scale must be sufficiently large; focus on people not papers. Whether these are good or bad remains debated. However, people expect Altmetrics to play more roles in the current open scholarly communication system.

5 Conclusion

Altmetrics can help develop open institutional repositories and support open access journal development. Studying its data model helps address challenges from open research data. Its computational methods and evaluation results enable librarians to obtain research statistics previously unavailable and assist in developing disciplinary consulting services and scientific information policy consulting.

Facing various possible transformations in scholarly communication systems, people have introduced Altmetrics extensively [29-31], and internationally renowned publishers like Nature [32], content integrators like Elsevier [33], and system suppliers like Ex Libris [34] have all developed Altmetrics services. Japan's Altas Co. has also developed paper retrieval systems based on ALMs and Altmetrics [35,36].

Notably, Altmetrics (Alternative Metrics) differs from Article-Level Metrics (ALMs). Tananbaum [37] defines Altmetrics as integrating multiple new data sources to measure the impact of a paper, journal, or scholar, while ALMs use some traditional (e.g., citation counts) and some new (e.g., Twitter) data to measure a paper's impact. Future research will conduct in-depth studies on ALMs.

Based on practical analysis of open data models and validation principles, this paper concludes that Altmetrics services are mature and continue to progress. Librarians can conduct preliminary experiments. This paper aims to spark further discussion.

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News Item:

Data-Planet and EBSCO Collaborate to Provide Statistical Data

Data-Planet and EBSCO have recently reached an agreement to provide statistical table information in discovery services—a major innovation. EBSCO’s discovery service EDS (EBSCO Discovery Service™) will provide mutual customers with over 5,000 abstract data records from Data-Planet, with EDS customers able to directly link to Data-Planet’s data tables.

Data-Planet’s statistical content repository currently contains more than 5,000 datasets, presented through over 2 billion data views (maps, trends, tables, rankings). These datasets come from reputable public and private organizations, covering 16 broad disciplinary areas including education, population and income, industry, commerce, trade, housing, and construction. All data are standardized and structured, described using 37 metadata fields including DOI, description, title, geographic entity, specific data elements, and standardized citations. Users can access all available views and download data.

According to Matt Dunie, President of Data-Planet, the collaboration with EBSCO is a natural extension of Data-Planet’s mission. “Our mission is to make statistical data more discoverable and usable, and our efforts align with the overall goals of discovery services.”

In addition to access through EBSCO Discovery Service, the Data-Planet repository can be accessed through two other interfaces: Data-Planet Statistical Datasets and Data-Planet Statistical Reference.

Like other content providers, Data-Planet and many publishers have begun collaborating with EDS to enhance content visibility. EDS partners include the world’s largest academic journal and book publishers, including Elsevier, Wiley-Blackwell, Springer Science+Business Media, Taylor & Francis Informa, Sage Publishing, Nature Publishing Group, IEEE, ACM, and thousands more, as well as content providers such as LexisNexis, Thomson Reuters, JSTOR, ARTstor, Credo Reference, Encyclopedia Britannica, ABC-CLIO, and HathiTrust.

EBSCO Discovery Service can create a unified, personalized index of an organization’s information resources and provide simple yet powerful access to all

content through a single search box. High-quality metadata, along with its depth and breadth, ensures powerful search functionality.

(Compiled from: <http://homepage.data-planet.com/data-planet%E2%84%A2-and-ebSCO-provide-mutual-customers-access-statistical-data-ebSCO-discovery-service%E2%84%A2>)

(Journal News)

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv – Machine translation. Verify with original.