

Altmetrics for university presses: Results from the Association of University Presses and Altmetric joint pilot

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About Altmetric

Altmetric was founded in 2011 and has made it a mission to track and analyze the online activity around scholarly literature. Altmetric collates what people are saying about published research outputs in sources such as the mainstream media, policy documents, social networks, blogs, and other scholarly and non-scholarly forums to provide a more robust picture of the influence and reach of scholarly work. Altmetric is part of the Digital Science portfolio. Find out more at altmetric.com.

About Association of University Presses

AUPresses advances the essential role of a global community of publishers whose mission is to ensure academic excellence and cultivate knowledge. The Association envisions a world that values the many ways that scholarship enriches societies, institutions, and individuals. Together, we are a community of publishing professionals and institutions committed to the highest caliber of research-based scholarship. Together, we advocate for the fundamental role of scholarly publishing in achieving academic excellence and in cultivating and disseminating knowledge. Find out more at aupresses.org.

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Introduction

In this report, we recount the lessons learned from a pilot project undertaken jointly by the Association of University Presses (AUPresses) and Altmetric.

Both organizations share the goal of helping publishers large and small respond to the fast-changing scholarly communication landscape. In recent years, many university presses have been faced with an increased demand to showcase the reach and public impacts of the important and often risky intellectual work that they publish.

In tracking altmetrics (diverse data from the social web that helps publishers and their authors understand who is talking about their research and what they are saying), Altmetric is uniquely situated to help presses discover and share their public and non-traditional scholarly influence with their authors, readers, and home institutions.

“Altmetrics” is an umbrella term used to describe the data that results from many kinds of sharing and discussion of scholarly works across the Web. These data can include links to research in public policy documents, mentions in news articles and book reviews, discussions in blogs and social media, citations in patents, and open, expert peer reviews.

AUPresses and Altmetric teamed up to understand how altmetrics could support the many functions of the average university press: recruiting new monograph ideas and authors; marketing a press’s current publications and backlist; tracking sales; and more. Could this nascent type of data actually help?

How are monographs shared online?

Altmetric tracks over 1.2 million books, including monographs, across seventeen kinds of online sources. Among other things, Altmetric’s data highlights:

- Use in university classrooms
- Citations in public policy documents
- Book reviews by other scholars
- Discussions in the news and social media

Altogether, books and their chapters have been shared online over 3.1 million times since 2011.

How are journal articles shared online?

Altmetric has tracked over 15 million journal articles since 2011. Journal articles are most often shared in social media, policy documents, patents, and the mainstream media. Journal articles from over 33,000 journals and collections have been mentioned more than 70 million times online.

The AUPresses & Altmetric Pilot

In 2017, AUPresses and Altmetric launched a pilot to track the online influence of monographs and journals published by university presses.

AUPresses ensured that the pilot was designed to help Association members use altmetrics to help with editorial decisions, promote their content, and demonstrate the reach and potential impact of books published by university presses. Association of University Presses' Director, Peter Berkery, says, *"University presses are very interested in new ways to assess the reach and impact of the scholarship they publish, and we were very pleased to be able to facilitate this opportunity. As more publishers seek to understand new modes of longform reading—open, digital, social—the experience of the pilot participants will be valued."*

Altmetric was keen to use the pilot to help develop technologies to better track attention to books. As Altmetric CEO Kathy Christian explains, *"University presses publish intellectually daring works that can potentially have unique public and scholarly influence. We saw this pilot with the Association of University Presses as an important chance to gain input on our products and data from world-class scholarly publishers."*

The pilot ran throughout 2017 and involved a number of respected university presses.



Participating presses



Pilot participants were given access to Altmetric Explorer, a searchable database of over 21 million scholarly outputs that includes journal articles, books and their chapters, datasets, and supplementary materials and their related mentions.

Altmetric offered trainings, ongoing technical support, and marketing assistance throughout the pilot period to help press staff make the most of Explorer.

In exchange, presses provided Altmetric with detailed metadata for their published monographs and journals, which Altmetric used to expand their coverage. Presses also provided valuable feedback to Altmetric on the usefulness of their data – an invaluable source of information for future product development.

Lessons learned

Through the many brainstorming sessions, technical calls, and meetings hosted over the course of the AUPresses-Altmetric pilot, we learned a number of important things.

Altmetrics can help you find interest in backlist titles

As Dennis Lloyd, Director of University of Wisconsin Press explains, *“The most interesting and unexpected information we gleaned from Altmetric concerned backlist monograph titles.*

“Given the necessity for press staff to focus their book marketing efforts on front list titles, seeing the kinds of titles that had historically been shared by much-sought-after ‘word of mouth’ yielded tantalizing insights into possible promotional strategies for new books to help extend their lives.

“Obviously, sometimes online attention is simply related to content. In those cases, Altmetric data helped our press to identify the backlist titles that might benefit from a new push based on their reception, rather than the more easily measured sales revenue.”

Not all altmetrics are equally valuable to university presses

Altmetrics are made up of diverse kinds of data, from social media to public policy to expert peer reviews and beyond. Some of these data types were considered more useful than others by AUPresses pilot participants.

Among the most valuable kinds of data were:

- **Monographs mentioned in syllabi:** Open Syllabus Project data from hundreds of universities worldwide can illuminate the educational impacts of press-published monographs.
- **Citations in public policy documents:** Research has been cited by policymakers from 59 NGOs and government bodies. These citations can be used to understand the “real world” impact of research.
- **Social media discussions:** Data from Twitter, Facebook, and other social networks can be used to understand the overall reach and diffusion of research.

The data that a press finds important will vary based upon the department that is using the data, and the overall press’s goals. Used as a complement to traditional metrics like sales and website page views, altmetrics can paint a fuller picture of the impacts of a press’s publications.

Journals are well-positioned to take advantage of altmetrics

Commercial publishers have long used altmetrics to understand the influence of the journal articles they publish.

Generally speaking, journal publishing platforms are designed in a way that makes it relatively easy to track altmetrics. They share standardized, machine-readable metadata about articles that allows altmetrics aggregators to discover their mentions across the Web.

Journal articles are also usually only published in a handful of places: the publisher's website and in some cases in subject or institutional repositories. That means that discussions that mention articles only tend to share links to a limited number of domains, which in turn makes it easy for Altmetric to track all the articles' mentions. In contrast, monographs can be published and sold through hundreds of websites, making it much more difficult to track every webpage that is linked to when monographs are discussed online.

Moreover, the relatively short turnaround from submission to publication for journal articles encourages more timely online discussions across social media than does the lengthier monograph publication cycle.

For these and other reasons, journals published by university presses are similarly well-positioned to benefit from altmetrics.

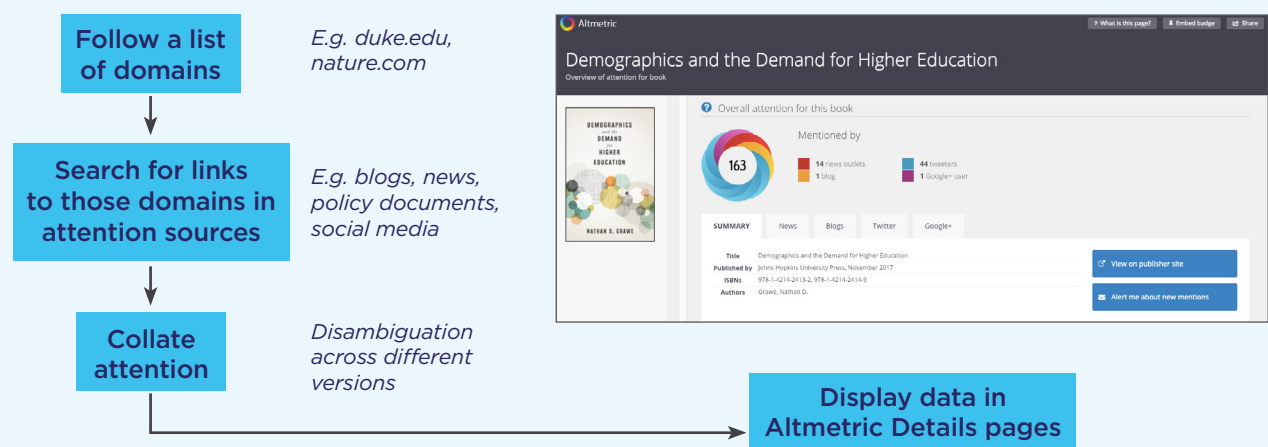
Good metadata is critical

To track altmetrics, Altmetric needs two things: to know that a research output exists and to be able to find and verify links to the output across the Web. To work well, both require that presses openly share their well-structured, complete metadata (descriptive information about a work that includes information like title and author).

Services like Altmetric can most easily match mentions to outputs if the press shares its books and journals metadata in a common format like ONIX or JSON. That allows Altmetric to import information about many outputs at once. In addition to using structured metadata, Altmetric has also built custom technology that scrapes presses' websites to ensure that all press publications are being tracked.

Once Altmetric is aware of a press's publications, they can then begin tracking them across the Web. Altmetric does this by looking for links to the press's website that is shared in any of the sources they track. When a relevant link is found, Altmetric's systems typically then follow the link and look at the webpage's meta tags to confirm whether the link shared belongs to a monograph or journal article.

Collating attention



During the pilot, Altmetric worked with the partner presses to add meta tags on publication webpages. Altmetric also added to their custom “scraper” technology to make it possible to scrape metadata from monograph pages that lacked structured data.

Though Altmetric was able to overcome some challenges in collecting publications’ metadata through building custom modules to capture press content, the approach is far from fail-safe. As websites change, URLs break and the content that Altmetric’s scrapers look for often is deleted or transformed. This can cause custom-built technologies to fail over time. A better approach is for presses to share their metadata in an open, standard, and reliable format like ONIX or JSON and in well-formatted webpage meta tags.

Summary

In this report, we summarized the lessons learned from a pilot project undertaken jointly by the Association of University Presses (AUPresses) and Altmetric. The aim of the project was to understand how altmetrics could support the many functions of the average university press: recruiting new monograph ideas and authors; marketing a press’s current publications and backlist; tracking sales; and more. The six participants were given access to the Altmetric Explorer and in exchange the presses provided Altmetric with detailed metadata for their published monographs and journals, which Altmetric used to expand their coverage, and feedback on the usefulness of their data. During the course of the pilot, we learned a number of important things:

- Altmetrics can help publishers find interest in backlist titles.
- Not all altmetrics are equally valuable to university presses. The most valuable data are: Monographs mentioned in syllabi, citations in public policy documents and social media discussions.
- Journals are well-positioned to take advantage of altmetrics as journals have faster publication times, when compared to monographs, and journal platforms are designed in a way that makes it relatively easy to track altmetrics.
- Last, but definitely not least: Good metadata is critical, and in the final section of this paper we are proposing some best practices for sharing metadata in a press website.

Best practices for sharing metadata in a press website

- Share monograph and journal article metadata in webpage meta tags
- Use a common metadata format like Dublin Core
- Include the output’s Identifier (e.g. <citation_doi>), Title (e.g. <citation_title>), Author (e.g. <citation_author>), and ISSN, if applicable (e.g. <citation_issn>)



For more information on Altmetric's offerings for university presses, contact us at info@altmetric.com or visit our website at altmetric.com.

To learn more about the members and mission of the Association of University Presses, please visit aupresses.org.

