



Professor Patrick Sullivan

"It takes a long time for a paper to accumulate academic citations, the slow motion way to gauge impact. Altmetrics have a different timescale and therefore are a much quicker and more comprehensive approach to impact."

*Altmetric Attention Score at the time of writing, 30 April 2019

Psychiatric Genomics Consortium: Using Altmetric data for grant applications

User Profile

Professor Patrick Sullivan is a psychiatric geneticist working at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (USA) and at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm (Sweden). Patrick is the lead PI of the [Psychiatric Genomics Consortium](#) (PGC), a global group of scientists studying the basic genetics of psychiatric disorders. The consortium consists of over 800 scientists from more than 40 countries.

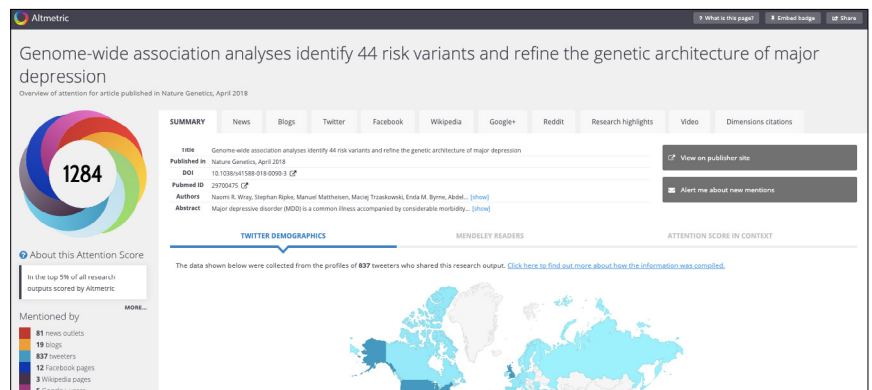
Objective

Patrick and his team are preparing to put in their 4th grant application. Writing a grant application is a very competitive activity these days, as increasingly funders want grant applicants to document the impact of their previous work.

Altmetric as an indication of engagement and influence

The team will be using the Altmetric donut and score in their grant application documentation as an indication of the engagement and influence of their earlier work. While looking at Altmetric's data for papers previously published by the PCG, Patrick discovered interesting differences in how much online attention their papers had received. A [paper](#) they published 5 years ago is one of the highest cited papers in their field, but did not get a lot of online attention right away. On the other hand, a [paper](#) published in *Nature Genetics* just over a year ago, which focussed on the genetics of major depression, has not received quite as many citations but already has an [Altmetric Attention Score](#) of 1284*. The accessible nature of this topic has led to the paper being widely discussed in various online sources such as Twitter, blogs and news outlets, which allows the authors and their funders to grasp the additional layer of online attention and reach that citations alone can not provide.

“The advantage of Altmetric is being able to put a number on the online attention and impact. It’s one thing for me to say in a grant application “this paper received a lot of attention”, it’s another thing to say it had an Altmetric Attention Score of 1,341 which places in the 99th percentile of similar papers. That’s much more impactful.”



Screenshot of the Altmetric detail page for the paper “Genome-wide association analyses identify 44 risk variants and refine the genetic architecture of major depression”, *Nature Genetics*, April 2018

The importance of an active social media strategy

Patrick finds that driving engagement with published research papers really comes down to hitting the public’s imagination in the right way at the right time. Some papers are scientifically really important but don’t get a lot of attention because they are about something very niche, or of lesser interest to a lay audience. Other papers get a lot of attention because of where they are published. Publishing in the most important journals in the field, especially when featuring on the cover with an illustration, of course helps a lot as well – and that can’t be engineered.

The PCG consortium has an active social media strategy and likes to let people know what’s going on with its research. They issue press releases around their most prominent research, are active on [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) (amongst other channels), and put research papers in BioRxiv. They therefore weren’t surprised to see that their Nature Genetics paper received a lot of online attention as that’s something they already follow closely.

In summary

Patrick sees Altmetric data as a valuable addition to prove impact of published work in grant applications, especially in combination with more slowly accruing citations.