Tracking success transcript

When you've gone to all the trouble of doing some excellent research or sharing something cool online, you'll want to find out if your endeavours have been successful or if they've even been noticed. But how do you track or measure success, especially online? Well that's where altmetrics come in.

Defined as 'alternative metrics' as in they are a complementary addition to existing traditional metrics such as citation impact or the h-index, altmetrics specifically look at online impact and reach of research. Altmetrics aren't confined to individual articles and can cover things such as data sets or even individual book chapters. But how do you actually get at these altmetrics? Well depending on what you want to measure, there are a variety of tools.

I've spoken about using Twitter for communicating and finding research, but did you know that Twitter also gives you shiny analytics? By using Twitter's inbuilt analytics function, you can see at-a-glance how your account has been performing month-by-month with handy stats such as which tweet was your top tweet of the month, who your top follower was or simply how many profile visits you had. You can dig deeper and export your analytics into Excel for further number crunching, you can even look at specific time periods and even find out weird and wonderful things like what mobile phone carrier people are using when they interact with your tweets or what your top demographics are.

Some of these analytics are more useful than others depending how you use Twitter. For a company promoting products for example, some of those demographics would probably be really handy but they could also be useful if you're tweeting about something like gender studies or working at encouraging more women into the sciences. You can also work out what tweets are working and which ones aren't depending on how they are interacted with. This might mean that you use more pictures or tweet at specific times of the day. The possibilities are endless. Using these analytics also allows you to build a picture of how people are interacting with the content that you are sharing, such as your research, and how widely that link to your new paper has gone around Twitter itself and beyond.

Another way of measuring the reach of a particular thing is TweetReach. TweetReach is a free service that you can use to track specific links. This is especially useful if you have tweeted a unique link to a piece of research or a blogpost and you want to see how it has been shared or interacted with. By running a TweetReach search on a particular URL, you get the opportunity to have some visualised data that gives you an overall picture of what has happened recently with your link of choice. Using this kind of visualised data to complement a report or track your own success is really useful way of using it and you can put a quick screengrab of your TweetReach results into existing reports or even add it to a Storify of a particular event, like the one here.

So far I've spoken specifically about Twitter and this mainly because a lot of people are using Twitter to communicate research and collaborate with fellow researchers. However there is a powerful tool that can pull all of these analytics together, as well as getting a really impressive view of the wider social media world and the wider web: Altmetric is not just a term, it is also a service.

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Altmetric pulls together mentions of research on social media, research blogs, policy documents, mainstream news and beyond. It allows for researchers to get instant stats on how their work is being received by the wider world and who is talking about it. Altmetric can give insights on things like reviews of a book or policy changes as a result of some findings, or even a piece of research going viral because it's really unique or maybe a little bit controversial! With useful visuals and additional tools like their browser bookmarklet, Altmetric allows researchers to get insights into their research which can be invaluable for reporting on how they've performed as well as sharing success with others.

Traditional citations are still valuable but they often take time to build up while altmetrics give more instant and evolving views of what is going on. As more and more people discuss research online, having these extra tools is more important to get the full picture of how successful you're being. You are able to judge your own impact as well as discover other research. Altmetrics is especially useful for those really niche subjects that don't always do too well with traditional metrics because they get swamped by the bigger disciplines. Altmetrics can often show something small having a big impact in the wider public imagination, which is often what research is all about!

So how are you going to track your next success? Let us know in the comments and see you next time!

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