

Why universities should care about Altmetrics

Blog post by Sarah Goodier
15 April 2014

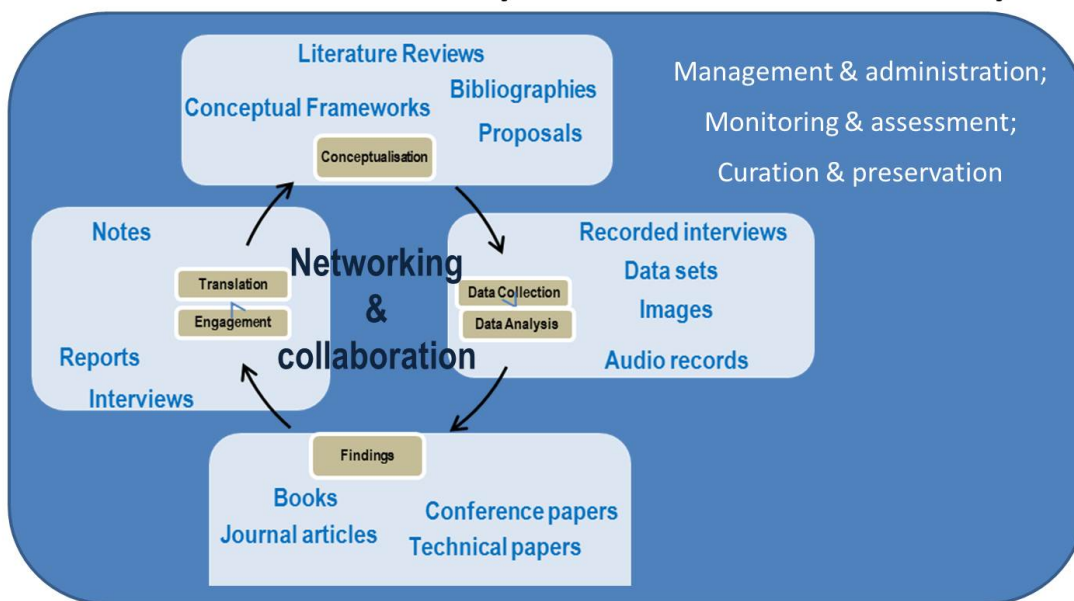
Altmetrics and the scholarly communication cycle

Working in a digital and increasingly connected environment has led to the rise of what has become known as the digital scholar: a "highly connected scholar, creating multimedia outputs and sharing these with a global network of peers" (Weller 2011). Journals are increasingly available online (when was the last time you went in search of a hard copy journal article?). And with search engines as the first place to start for most people looking for (scholarly) information in our digital world, online visibility is becoming more important for academics – increasingly so if they want their work to be found, read and cited.

Universities often don't have their own in-house tools and services available to assist academics in their journey towards being a digital scholar, achieving a good online presence and curating and sharing their work. Many institutions have static (and often outdated) academic profiles which usually aren't user-friendly or easy to access and are often updated by the IT unit or a departmental representative and not by the academic themselves. Not surprisingly, academics don't feel as if they own this space or have much control over it, so they have to go outside the university to showcase their work and collaborations – which is likely to help them attract recognition, prestige, funding and promotions.

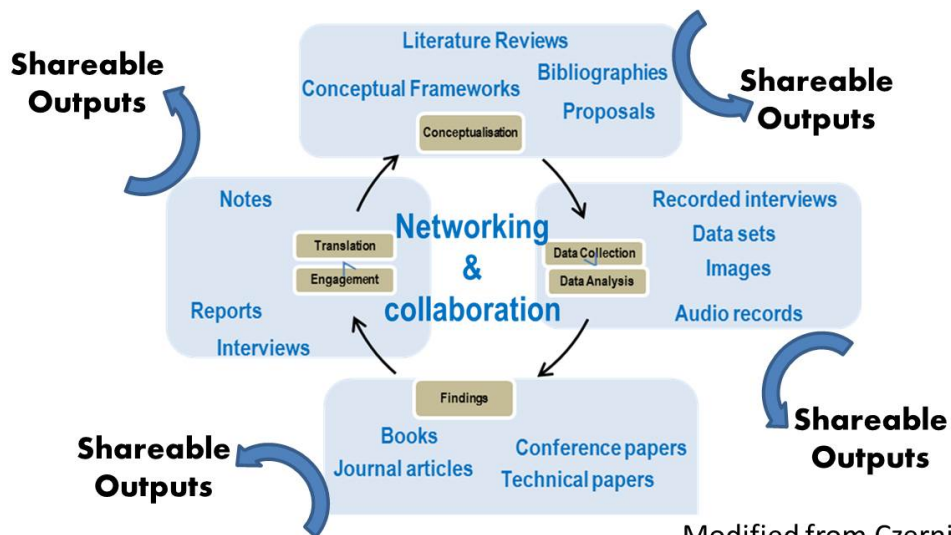
Below is a representation of the scholarly communication cycle, indicating the major steps from conceptualisation of a research idea through data collection and analysis, findings and engagement and translation (in a teaching and learning context); with the blue boxes indicating various outputs that can be associated with each stage. An element around this cycle (indicated by the dark blue box) is the administration and monitoring processes associated with research activities. These are required as part of the management of the institution's research output record (and, thus, a link to the publishing elements of the lifecycle):

Research & scholarly communication cycle



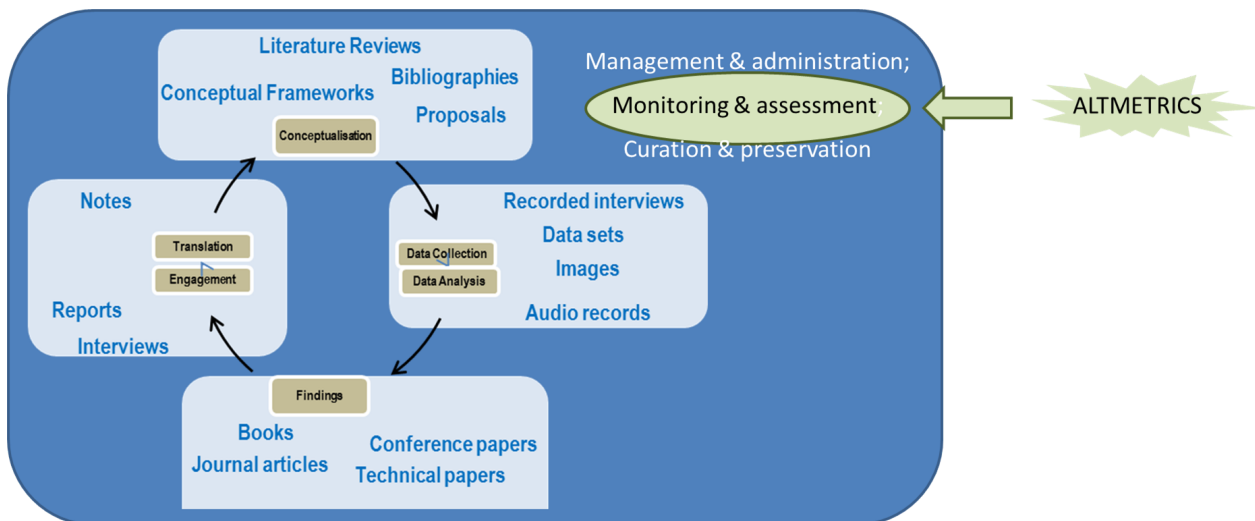
Modified from Czerniewicz (2013)

The task of monitoring and assessing academic outputs can be seen as increasingly challenging at the institutional level in an environment enabled by the web, where outputs can potentially be published and shared at any point in the scholarly communication cycle – both within and beyond the university environment:



Modified from Czerniewicz (2013)

And this is where altmetrics comes in - these novel metrics provide a way to measure research impact and reach of both traditional scholarly works online as well as other outputs (e.g. news articles, blogs, educational resources) and can be seen to feed into the monitoring and assessment layer around the research and scholarly communication cycle, helping universities (and academics) keep track of their research work and other outputs:



Modified from Czerniewicz, 2013

Academics can and do utilise many Web 2.0 tools and service for research, collaboration and sharing outside of the institutional environment and altmetrics is a part of the toolkit that can be used to measure impact and monitor and assess shared research outputs at all points of the research cycle.

My take on this? For academia to stay up with the fast-paced changes in the digital world, the use of altmetrics is something that institutions should consider supporting and recognising in the near future - to better support academics and help to measure their online visibility as well as the impact of their work online.

References:

Czerniewicz, L. 2013. *The changing digitally-mediated scholarship landscape*. Available online at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1982&context=iatul>

Weller, M. 2011. *The Digital Scholar: How Technology Is Transforming Scholarly Practice*. Bloomsbury Academic Press, London. pp. 265. Available online at: http://www.bloomsburyacademic.com/view/DigitalScholar_9781849666275/chapter-ba-9781849666275-chapter-001.xml; DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849666275>

This blog post is based on a workshop I presented last year at the eResearch Africa Conference on "Addressing Academic Profile: New Tools and Services for Boosting Online Visibility".

by SarahG
[Blog post](#)



Comments

AltMetrics

Submitted by Ed Rybicki on Wed, 04/16/2014 - 11:50

I think judicious use of AltMetrics will soon prove invaluable in the University setting: there really is presently no even semi-quantifiable way of assessing social impact by an academic, or of his/her work. This will inevitably be very useful in Humanities, but also for the non-cited/citable contributions by academics who publish mainly in the formal journals.

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