Open Access, Altmetrics and Readership

Those who advocate Open Access recognise that a scholarly work has the potential to interest a broader audience, academic and non-academic. It may come as a surprise who takes an interest outside of the author's immediate network, but consider the amount of primary research taking place outside of academia and it may not be such a surprise after all. For example, a reader with access to articles and data working in a business' research and development department could accelerate innovation and discovery at pace, much faster than the time it could take to accrue one citation.

Non-academic audiences could unlock the potential for real-life impact by pushing and promoting literature to different communication channels. Other examples of non-academic audiences are journalists, citizen scientists, medical patients and their supporting networks, health advocates, NGOs and those who work in linguistics and translation. In other words, anyone who uses information opens up possibilities for knowledge to be used or connected in unexpected, creative and innovative ways.

Recognising that research is being read by a non-academic audience is one thing, but how would an author necessarily know that their research has been applied when the non-academic isn't likely to cite it? Altmetrics help this conundrum by tracking the attention research gets largely outside of academia.
Altmetrics are an excellent measure of readership, and the increase in Open Access scholarship has also opened up data around non-academic readership, impact and usage. When it comes to attracting attention from non-academic audiences news and social media are a key, which is why many large-scale publishers and newer, purely OA publishers heavily resource their online social media presence and public relations. If you are an author wanting to reach a non-academic audience, consider asking what value added services your journal offers to make your research appeal. Good examples include audio-visual content, podcasting, active social media, interoperability with other research discovery platforms and, of course, Open Access. When thinking about where to publish your research consider using Altmetric Explorer to see what coverage articles in your shortlisted journals are getting online. You may even wish to investigate conversations taking place around particular journals in your field and contribute to the discussion!

Altmetric Explorer view of journals on 'disease' and their mentions

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