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Gabrielle Hayes,

Liaison Librarian (Science and Engineering Faculty),
Queensland University
of Technology

Getting the big picture on research influence with Altmetric Explorer

User profile

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) is a major Australian university with a global outlook. Its research strengths are reflected in ten dedicated centres specialising in areas from robotics to healthcare transformation.

One of QUT’s key aspirations is to lead in open science and open scholarship; it seeks to maximise knowledge-sharing, locally and globally. In July 2020 its public-facing, open- access repository achieved the milestone of over 30 million downloads.

Objective

Gabrielle Hayes is a Liaison Librarian for the Science and Engineering Faculty (SEF). In her role supporting STEM researchers, she needed a way to demonstrate the influence and engagement of their publications alongside the traditional citation metrics.

It’s increasingly vital for research institutes to be able to do this – especially in Australia. There the National Innovation Science Agenda (NISA) advises people to look beyond academic performance when they evaluate university research; they are also encouraged to consider non-academic influence and industry engagement.

QUT was already aware of Altmetric, which collects relevant mentions of research from social media sites, newspapers, policy documents, blogs, Wikipedia and more. The “Altmetric attention score and donut” can reveal a piece of research’s online attention and activity, and the university’s institutional repository had added the Altmetric widget to other metrics in its records of publications.

Altmetric Explorer reveals research reach and influence

But Gabrielle then discovered the extra capabilities of Altmetric Explorer. After setting up its monthly reporting, she soon saw a lot of activity on the publications in her areas – activity that her faculty researchers weren’t necessarily aware of.

Now, every month, Gabrielle turns the Altmetric Explorer data into a user-friendly slide with the title “Who’s Talking About [School Name]?” This reveals the five publications

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that have seen the most activity that month, and a summary of that activity. She shares this slide with the relevant Head of School and the Director of Research, who present it at the monthly School meeting and other Faculty forums.

Gabrielle explains: “Providing the SEF’s Schools with this information demonstrates how Altmetric data can be used to showcase a publication or an individual author; reveals a publication’s international reach; and allows them to see how “buzz” around a publication can appear weeks, months or years after it’s first published. These Altmetric reports have become an everyday part of the way the SEF Library Team supports the Faculty in promoting and tracking research influence.”

The service has been very well received by the Faculty. “Back when I began, many STEM people could be sceptical about the value of complementary metrics,” says Gabrielle. “But since providing them with Altmetric data, I’ve always received positive feedback as to its usefulness and value. While there’s a good range of other tools for analysing research influence, Altmetric adds an additional and unique perspective to the influence of a piece of research in the discipline and its engagement with the world outside academia.”

Bringing benefits to the wider organisation

Using Altmetric Explorer keeps the librarians up to speed with new citations. For example, just days after a government policy document was published, they discovered that it cited many SEF publications. They could immediately alert the authors, Directors of Research and Heads of School to an achievement that they were unaware of.

This added to the Library’s reputation as a proactive and knowledgeable partner in supporting research across the university. As a result, other university teams became interested in using Altmetric Explorer in their work.

“They were told about the Library’s apparent wizardry in this area by key Faculty staff impressed with our data and fast response,” explains Gabrielle. “We now work with the Faculty Communications team using Altmetric Explorer to promote the Faculty Research publications and achievements through all their channels and media. This collaboration has resulted in several projects that have brought great benefits to the organisation – and it came about as a direct result of the unique data that Altmetric Explorer can provide.”