Law Libraries as Publishers
Counting Things, with Altmetrics
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In the last *Law Libraries as Publishers* column, we looked at measuring the use of scholarly works using citations and download counts. Here we will consider other measures of scholarly impact, most of which fall under the umbrella of altmetrics (shortened from alternative metrics). Mark Popielarski has a useful *AALL Spectrum* article on altmetrics I recommend (http://www.aallnet.org/mm/Publications/spectrum/Archives/Vol-19/No-2/altmetrics.pdf).

What does and does not count as altmetrics depends on who you ask, but I mean any measure of scholarly use other than citations. Altmetrics also implies an emphasis on social media, both popular (such as Facebook and Twitter) and for academic

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specialists (such as Mendeley and ResearchGate). Altmetrics has some interesting applications in legal scholarship. Many legal academics are active bloggers, and I regularly see law review articles and remarks about them appearing in my Twitter feed. Academics in many fields also use social media and bookmarking sites to collect and share articles. Altmetrics captures this use of and discussion about a scholarly work.

Suppose a professor writes an article, posts it to SSRN, and publishes it in a law journal. If nothing else was done, the professor would look to the SSRN download count and citations in various research services to document how the article was used. However, suppose further that the professor announced the article on Twitter and wrote a blog post about it. Altmetrics tools may note re-tweets or mentions on Twitter, social media likes (thumbs-up, hearts, stars, whatnot) and bookmarking site saves

(like Mendeley or CiteULike). These types of activity tend to happen more closely to the article's publication than citations in formal literature, and they show attention that may be valuable, though less so than citations. Altmetrics counts things that bibliometric tools could not notice up to this point.

One should wonder how valuable altmetrics counts are. Just as knowing an article was downloaded 500 times does not, on its own, mean it was read by 500 people, or that the article is important or meritorious, knowing an article received 100 Facebook likes does not mean 100 people read it or agree with the article's main point. I see two

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main values of altmetrics: providing quantifiable evidence of influence for works that are not covered by legal citation tools, and documenting attention paid outside academe.

Blog posts, popular media writings, white papers, and the like can be important works, but are unlikely to be cited in formal literature. Altmetrics counts indicators of influence for works that otherwise would have no countable impact. Use by audiences outside academe (journalists and think tanks, for example), may not show up in citation tools, but mentions in blog posts or social media would be counted by altmetrics tools.

I am not making a very strong argument for altmetrics here. I need answers to many questions, such as how heavily did the author promote her article online, or what is the average number of retweets for this field, before I can decide what altmetric counts mean in legal scholarship. Citations and journal rankings alone, though, do not adequately express the contribution an article makes, and I think altmetrics is moving in a positive direction.

Law Libraries as Publishers—Counting

How can a library use altmetrics in their publishing work? Identifying and counting likes and mentions is performed by altmetrics vendors, whose programs use URLs and standard identifiers to flag when a work gets some kind of attention. I know of three main vendors in this space: Altmetric, Plum Analytics and ImpactStory.

Altmetric and Plum Analytics (recently acquired by EBSCO) seem to have focused on publishers and institutions, while ImpactStory directs itself toward individual researchers. Once your institution has a

subscription with a vendor, you provide identifiers (mostly URLs, but also ISBNs, DOIs and other forms) for the works you want to track. Altmetrics depends on consistent identifiers for each work, so if copies of an article exist in five different places (SSRN, journal site, institutional repository, author's personal site, law school site), then use all five URLs to capture the most complete metrics possible. The vendor will collect the metrics and present it in a centralized dashboard and make a profile for each work.

These metrics can be represented on a page for the article in a variety of ways. This provides the same

gratification authors and readers get from seeing a download count on the article page. For some examples, see—

- the University of Pittsburgh Law Review (http:// dx.doi.org/10.5195/lawreview.2012.190),
- Legal Reference Services Quarterly (http:// dx.doi.org/10.1080/0270319X.2015.1038143),
- PLoS ONE (http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/ journal.pone.0047523), and
- Nature (http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/482027a).

It is important to understand what data sources each vendor is using to compile article metrics. See these links for Altmetric (http://www.altmetric.com/ whatwedo.php#score), Plum Analytics (http:// plumanalytics.com/learn/about-metrics/), and ImpactStory (http://feedback.impactstory.org/ knowledgebase/articles/367139-what-data-do-you- include-on-profiles) to compare their scopes. Knowing how your vendor works will help you advise authors on what venues to use in promoting their work and can help you explain why their colleague at another school is getting different counts from another vendor.

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Altmetric and Plum Analytics offer free trials, and ImpactStory is very affordable for individuals and has a no-questions fee waiver for individuals that cannot afford a subscription. I think all three are worth exploring to see what metrics can be compiled for yourself or one of your faculty. Citations, download counts, and altmetrics each capture different aspects of scholarly influence. Libraries should collect and display these metrics with the perspective born of critically evaluating information sources.

If you have any thoughts on altmetrics or law library publishing (suggestions for future topics are most welcome, too), please write to me at bkeele@indiana.edu.