

Making Altmetrics Relevant for Students

Sarah Crissinger
crissin2@illinois.edu

One way to enable students to grasp the difference between altmetrics and impact factor is to make it more relevant or personal for them. This happens by putting in terms that they can relate to. One thing that most students understand is music and the music industry. This exercise uses their familiarity with music to teach them bibliometric concepts.

1. Ask students to name an artist or band (or provide one if that makes you more comfortable)
 - For this example, I will be using the Beatles
2. Ask students to think about how this band should be evaluated. What speaks to their success and impact?
3. Suggest to students that one way we could measure success would be record sales. We know that the Beatles sold millions of records. But is that the only way we should evaluate them?
 - Compare this to impact factor—it's a purely quantitative means of evaluation and while it provides some information about impact, it isn't a holistic picture
4. Ask students to brainstorm some other indicators of impact for the Beatles.
 - Some examples of this might include how many Grammys they won, what magazine covers they were on, if (or how much) memorabilia they have, if other artists reference them or their lyrics decades after their work, what radio station's commentary of them is, if there are books written about them, etc. etc.
5. This exercise enables students to realize that impact is much more complicated than we make it!
6. Suggest to students that the almetrics movement is based on this idea—that impact is complicated and should be measured through many different outlets. Emphasize that record sales (or impact factor) is still important; altmetrics doesn't suggest that we should get rid of quantitative measures. Instead, we should use multiple metrics to get a clearer, more holistic understanding of an individual's work.
7. Provide students with examples of altmetrics measure examples, like download counts through Mendeley, social media posts and retweets, news coverage, poster presentations, blogging, or use of data sets. Tell students that these measures are very similar to the measures we talked about for the Beatles; we want to look at them—in *combination with record sales (or citations)*—to better understand the band's (or scholar's) influence on the field.