

New report lays groundwork for improving social and behavioral science impact metrics

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While measurement of science impact has traditionally been synonymous with citation counts in academic journals, such counts fail to capture the influence that research can have on policy, practice, and the public. While the social and behavioral sciences (SBS) are uniquely positioned to make this impact and thus benefit society, their true impact is often ignored or overlooked. As a result, sustained attention is needed to help bring attention to SBS' value. A [new report](#) out today establishes imperatives and recommended actions to improve the measurement of SBS impact.

The report summarizes key points from a workshop SAGE convened in February with world-leading experts on research [impact](#). Participants represented the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Altmetric, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, Clarivate Analytics, Google, New York University, SAGE, School Dash, SciTech Strategies, the Social Science Research Council, and the University of Washington.

Key takeaways from the report include:

1. The full scholarly community must believe that new impact metrics are useful, necessary, and beneficial to society.
2. A robust new regime of impact measurement must transcend, but not necessarily supplant, current literature-based systems.

3. A new regime of social [science](#) impact measures must integrate the experiences and expectations of how nonacademic stakeholders will define impact.
4. All stakeholders must understand that although social science impact is measurable, social science is not STEM, and social science's impact measurements may echo STEM's but are unlikely to mirror them.
5. Social science needs a global vocabulary, a global taxonomy, global metadata, and finally a global set of benchmarks for talking about impact measurement.

The report also maps out stakeholder categories, defines key terms and questions, puts forward four models for assessing impact, proposes next steps, and presents a list of 45 resources and data sources that could help in creating a model of SBS impact. SAGE's new impact initiative focuses on SBS specifically, exploring unique features that distinguish SBS from natural sciences, whether it be the threats to funding aimed specifically at social and behavioral fields or the integral nature of human action in every other field.

Ziyad Marar, President of Global Publishing at SAGE, commented:

"Despite so many major issues we face having a social facet, funding to study this reality through social science is precarious and growing more so. Funders increasingly ask for evidence of societal impact and some researchers—particularly those who want their work to improve aspects of society—do too. And yet so many of the existing measures fail to adequately assess the true value of social research. At the same time, today's data-driven world provides new tools, methods, and sources of information for measuring the impact of research outside of conventional citation counts. This is an opportune time to address the best ways to improve upon and expand social science metrics as part of

the wider and more nuanced debate we need to have about impact."

The report initiates a sustained campaign from SAGE that addresses how "good" SBS research is assessed, how existing measures could be improved, and if new solutions could be developed. Updates on this ongoing effort are housed on the new [Impact section](#) of the community site Social Science Space, which is also being used to gather ideas and host a debate about impact with any global actors engaged on the topic.

Marar continued, "At SAGE, we recognize that real change will require long-term investments and as an independent company that has been dedicated to the social sciences for nearly 55 years, are in it for the long term. We hope that we can inspire others to join this effort—through our channels or others—for the betterment of [social science](#)."

Provided by SAGE Publications

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