Four Things We've Learned from the LSE RB Reader Community Survey

blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2016/06/28/four-things-weve-learned-from-the-lse-rb-reader-community-survey/

Ahead of the launch of the LSE Review of Books Advisory Board next week, Managing Editor, **Rosemary Deller***, reflects on key insights gleaned from our LSE RB Reader Community Survey. Covering the geographical location of readers, reception of our reviews and possible content innovations, this feedback suggests some exciting new directions for the LSE RB blog over the coming months.*

Image Credit: ([wackystuff CC 2.0](#))

LSE Review of Books and our sister blog, *[Impact of Social Sciences](#)*, recently celebrated our 4th birthdays! After the candles were blown out and the cake eating was over, we reflected on what we have undertaken over the past 4 years and the ways that the blogs can continue to build on this. Analytics can provide a good quantitative overview of where our readers are located, how you access the blog and the content that you find particularly interesting. But to get a deeper understanding of this, we decided to conduct our first ever Reader Community Survey earlier this year. We were keen for you to tell us more about your use of the blog, the content you most appreciate and other features that you might like to see in the future.

This process has allowed us to think further about the invaluable support of our reader and contributor communities, what the blog has been able to accomplish through these and how we can develop contributor involvement and editorial support. Ultimately, we want to ensure that as we plan the future directions of *LSE RB,* this is in dialogue with our readers and contributors, and that we are also responsive to the changing landscape of Higher Education and academic publishing.

This is our brief look at the key insights we've gained from this process, how we've begun acting on what we've learned so far and what the future of the blog holds:
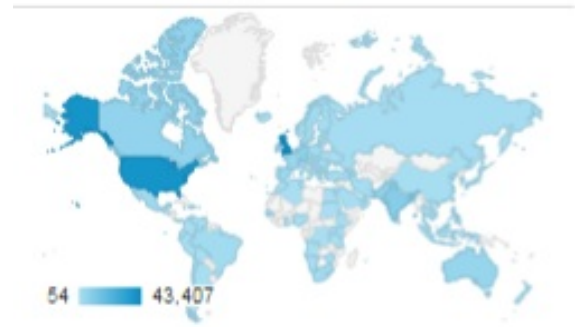
1). Our reader and contributor community is international – and our content needs to continue reflecting

this

LSE RB aims to respond to the latest publications that show the dynamic developments across the social sciences globally. However, as a UK-based blog that focuses primarily on new English-language books, the challenge has been to ensure that we reflect the international social science community. This question has also become increasingly prominent within discussions of academic publishing today – as shown through recent conferences on The Academic Book in the South and Book History Beyond the Book in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, panels at the London Book Fair 2016 and Dr Ola Uduku's blog post reflecting on The Future of the Academic Book in Africa. In this light and given the geographical location of our reader and contributor community, *LSE Review of Books* is particularly looking at developing our coverage of South Asia, Latin America and Africa to ensure that we showcase the global nature of social science research.

2). 99% of readers would recommend *LSE RB* to colleagues

A key measure of success that we monitor closely is not only whether our readers find our content useful, interesting and engaging, but also whether they choose to share it with others. Whether this is via Twitter, email or word of mouth, we are always looking to discover new ways to capture what content people are sharing, and how they are choosing to do so. Our survey provided great insight into this, and we are very grateful for the positive affirmation:

54 ▭ 43,407

Country

🇬🇧 United Kingdom

🇺🇸 United States

🇮🇳 India

🇩🇪 Germany

🇨🇦 Canada

🇵🇰 Pakistan

🇦🇺 Australia

🇫🇷 France

🇪🇸 Spain

🇳🇱 Netherlands

'LSE Review of Books provides resourceful, thought-provoking reviews, alongside pointing its readers to relevant literature. For myself as an alumnus, LSE Review of Books is a primary means of staying updated on the developments in my field of interest.'

Anonymous Feedback from LSE RB Reader Community Survey (Image Credit: [Matt Neale CC 2.0](#)**)**

However, as Sierra Williams, Managing Editor of *Impact of Social Sciences,* [points out](#), it is crucial to understand what sharing and reuse actually means, and the modes of collaboration and discussion that it can encourage. We have been very pleased, for instance, to learn of our [reviewers being quoted in articles](#) or becoming [suggested course reading material](#). We have some exciting plans in store to follow up on these insights over the next year – stay tuned!

3). 84% of readers work or study in Higher Education

As a scholarly blog, a core goal of *LSE RB* has been to provide a forum for instigating and expanding dialogue on the latest research being published by social science researchers at all levels, and to give opportunities for contributors to enter into and shape debates as these emerge across institutions and disciplines. It was therefore not surprising to discover that 84% of our readers work or study in Higher Education:

> *'I recommend it to my Harvard PhD students – it's a great way of being alert to new releases and research.'*

Though we are delighted to hear that our reviews appeal to students, early career researchers and lecturers alike, that our content can be accessed for free worldwide also reflects our wish to provide a space for non-academic audiences to engage with social science research. Publishing outside of paywall structures allows us to welcome academic and non-academic audiences, so *LSE RB* will continue to explore new ways for our reviews to reach a wider reader community – whether through featuring contributors with professional experience or through covering more 'crossover' books.

4). When it comes to new content, innovation is great – but so is 'keeping your eyes on the prize'

We love to explore ways that our content can continue responding to readers' diverse interests and needs as well as the changing landscape of academic publishing. Yet, what was clear from the Reader Community Survey was the focus on reviews as our core content was seen as a key strength of the blog, with nearly 98% of readers valuing this as the most useful material:

> *'I actually like LSE Review of Books because of its tight focus on book reviews. I know that if I go there, this is what I will get and not get distracted with other content.'*

Nonetheless, what was also evident was that careful and relevant expansion of content would be welcome, and we were excited to read your suggestions for this:

'Interviews with authors would be great to read alongside reviews. Video reviews or interviews, a book club and longform essays would add to the value of the site too.'

Anonymous Feedback, LSE Reader Community Survey (Image Credit:*Robert* CC 2.0)

This feedback has encouraged us to begin experimenting with commissioning new content, and we've already responded to these suggestions through a number of recently launched features, including a 'Materiality of Research' essay series on academic writing, interviews and 'Longer Read' review essays.

Working alongside you has always been vital to us: it is our reader and contributor communities that write the great features that appear on the blog, allow us to explore, share, discuss and celebrate existing and emerging perspectives and find innovative ways of reaching wider audiences with the latest academic research. Through our Reader Community Survey, we've learned a lot, we're looking to implement productive changes and we're excited about the future of *LSE Review of Books*. To help us navigate these new directions, we're also enlisting the help of an esteemed Advisory Board, launching next week. So thank you – and watch this space!

Rosemary Deller is the Managing Editor of *LSE Review of Books*.