Social Sciences Inquiry: Evaluating & Citing Web Resources

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October 2006
Objective: Search Smarter!

1. Search strategies & advanced search tips
2. Google alternatives: other search engines & subject directories
3. The good, bad & ugly: evaluating web sites.
Challenge! (2 minutes)

search for websites on community leadership & volunteerism

Hint: Use your favourite search engine!
Let’s talk about what you did...

- where did you search?
- what did you type in?
Search Engines e.g. Google

- What Are They?
  - spider/crawler/robot
  - database of collected pages
  - search software
  - relevance-ranking engine
Tips & Tricks

Search engine tips:

✓ Phrase searching
  • double quotes
  • e.g. “community leadership”
Tips & Tricks

Search engine tips:

• add and subtract: + / -
  • “community leadership” +volunteerism -program
Tips & Tricks

Search engine tips:
Check out the Advanced Search screen, e.g.
- “community leadership” +volunteerism -program
- Date: past 3 months
- Domain: .gov
Let’s talk about Web search...

- What’s your favourite search engine?
- why?
Why use anything other than Google...?

• Google doesn’t search the *entire* Web!

• Google’s relevance ranking can be flawed
  • Why is [this site](#) the top result in a search for “Martin Luther King”?
  • What’s the [top result](#) for the same search on ask.com?
Why use anything other than Google...?

- Other search engines do some things better than Google:
  - Related searches
  - Expand/narrow your search
Alternatives to Google!

1SS3: Evaluating & Citing Web Resources
Library’s Internet Search Page

- go to Library home page
  - http://library.mcmaster.ca

- under SEARCH click on the Web tab

- ...and click on More Web Search Options >>
Subject Directories

Why use a subject directory?
✓ arranged by topic
✓ compiled by people!
✓ browse OR search
✓ high relevance
The good, bad & ugly: evaluating websites

✓ Accuracy
✓ Authority
✓ Objectivity
✓ Currency
✓ Coverage

✓ see original evaluation checklists at Evaluating Web Resources (Widener)
The good, bad & ugly: evaluating websites

ACCURACY:

✓ Are the sources cited/documentated?
✓ Can you verify the legitimacy of the information & sources?
✓ Who is the author? Does he/she have the credentials to publish on the topic?
The good, bad & ugly: evaluating websites

AUTHORITY:

✓ Who is the author? (are there signs of self-publishing? Blogs? Wikis?)
✓ Known in the field?
✓ Is there an “about” section that provides more info? (institutional affiliation, education, contact info, etc.)
✓ Who links to the site? (check Google Advanced search to find out)
✓ What is the domain?
The good, bad & ugly: evaluating websites

OBJECTIVITY:

✓ What is the aim of the author in publishing the site?
✓ What’s the purpose of the site:
  ✓ To advertise a service or product?
  ✓ Political?
  ✓ Sway opinion?
✓ Can you trust the author?
The good, bad & ugly: evaluating websites

CURRENCY:

✓ What’s the “last updated” date on the site?
✓ Are the information & resources current?
✓ Are there broken links?
The good, bad & ugly: evaluating websites

COVERAGE:
✓ Is the content of the site explored in-depth?
✓ Are there links to other sites of interest?
✓ Beware personal biases!
Challenge:
Evaluate these 2 web sites & decide which is more authoritative:

http://www.dhmo.org
http://www.greenfacts.org

(3 minutes)
Citing Web Documents: Minimum Requirements

- document title or description
- date
  - date of publication or last update
  - date of retrieval
- address (URL)
- where possible:
  - author, and author’s institutional affiliation
Example of a Web Citation

Recap: what have you learned?

- Search strategies:
  - “phrase searching”
  - +/-
- Google’s advanced search:
  - Date
  - Domain
- Why use anything other than Google?
- Why use subject directories?
- Criteria for evaluating web resources
Questions?

...and don’t forget -
Need Help? Just Ask!

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