Social Sciences Inquiry: Evaluating & Citing Web Resources

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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 the web for websites on the *visible minorities and community*

*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. “visible minorities”
Tips & Tricks

Search engine tips:

• add and subtract: + / -
  • e.g. “visible minorities” +community
  • e.g. “star wars” +defense -movie
Tips & Tricks

Search engine tips:
Check out the Advanced Search screen, e.g.
- “visible minorities” +identity
- Date: past year
- Domain: .edu
Let’s talk about Web search...

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

- No, 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?
- Other search engines do some things better than Google:
  - Related searches
  - Expand/narrow your search
Why use anything other than Google...?

- Other search engines do some things better than Google:
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Alternatives to Google!

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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)](http://library.widener.edu/specialcollections/evaluation_checklists.html)
The good, bad & ugly: evaluating websites

ACCURACY:

✓ Are the sources cited/documented?
✓ 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!
The good, bad & ugly: evaluating websites

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?

Need Help? Just Ask!

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