Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Bibliometric Analysis Provides a Detailed Map of Information Literacy Literature in the Social Sciences and Humanities

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Evidence Summary

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A Review of:
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Abstract

Objective – To determine the scope and distribution of information literacy research documents in the humanities and social sciences published from 2001 to 2012.

Design – Bibliometric analysis.

Setting – N/A

Subjects – 1,990 document records retrieved from a Scopus database search.

Methods – Using the database Scopus, the author created and conducted a search for documents related to the concept of information literacy. Articles, review papers, conference articles, notes, short surveys, and letters were included in the results. Only documents published from January 1, 2001 to December 31, 2012 were included in the study. The author then performed various bibliometric analyses of the results.

Main Results – The author found that the number of publications and citations have increased over time, although the average citations per publication (ACPP) decreased significantly during the time period being studied. The majority of the literature published on this topic is in English and produced within the United States. The Transformative Activity Index was calculated

to determine changes in publishing patterns across countries from 2001 to 2012. The amount of research collaboration across countries was calculated as well, with the U.S. being the most collaborative. The top journals publishing on this topic were identified by calculating the h-index. An individual from Universidad de Granada in Spain published the greatest number of articles from a single author, and this university was found to have produced the greatest amount of research. Documents produced by the United Kingdom have the highest citation rates. A total of 1,385 documents were cited at least once, and each item on average was cited five times.

Conclusion – Most of the articles on information literacy in the social sciences and humanities comes from developed countries. The results of this study may help to inform those interested in researching this field further.

Commentary

The quality of this study was appraised using "The CAT: A generic critical appraisal tool" created by Perryman and Rathbun-Grubb (2014). Based on this analysis, the quality of the study was found to be moderate. The author is a librarian at a college within a large public university system in India and has a PhD as well as multiple Master's degrees. A literature review was included in the article, and the research questions were clearly defined.

Most of the methods were thoroughly explained; however, there was no explanation of how the author determined which documents fell within the subject area of social sciences and humanities. Additionally, for some metrics, other subject areas such as health sciences were included in the analysis without any explanation as to why. A description of screening procedures was also not included. These factors significantly hinder transparency and reproducibility.

Other limitations were mentioned in the article, including the fact that Scopus does not have complete coverage of all relevant journals, as well as the fact that it does not include book chapters, dissertations, and theses. Additionally, Scopus also has limited geographic coverage, which may have altered the results. These limitations could have been mitigated by searching additional databases.

The author used bibliometric measures that are commonly used in these types of analyses, such as the h-index and the Transformative Activity Index (TAI). Although it would have also been useful to include an examination of the altmetrics of these documents to more fully assess their reach, this step was most likely beyond the scope of this study.

The author describes some of the benefits of this study pertaining directly to information literacy instruction; however, these cannot be surmised from the data obtained. For example, the author states that "the study will assist in designing a new information literacy course structure through an understanding of the progress in the area …" yet this is an assumption not justified by the findings. Additional research would need to be conducted in order to support these claims.

As mentioned by the author, this research is unique in that there are no previous studies detailing the scholarship on information literacy in these specific subject areas. Therefore, this study provides unique information that may be used by others interested in conducting research within this field. For example, researchers may want to know which authors and previous publications have received the most citations so that they can be sure to consider these specific works when developing their own studies.

References

Perryman, C., & Rathbun-Grubb, S. (2014). The CAT: A generic critical appraisal tool. In *Jotform – Formbuilder*. Retrieved from http://www.jotform.us/cp1757/TheCat