

Value of Grey Literature to Scholarly Research in the Digital Age

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Definition

- By its broadest definition, grey literature is a body of materials that cannot be found easily through conventional channels such as publishers. Can include:
 - government research
 - non-profit reports
 - think tank assessments
 - reports from observations, investigations, and other primary resource materials
- Today, findability is no longer the driving challenge.

Definition (continued)

- Reputation is the key. Once you find something, whether you can trust the source remains an important consideration
- Some of the factors in that trust today include:
 - Peer review (professional integrity)
 - Persistence of access (citability), and
 - availability of metadata (identification)
- All are factors necessary to evaluate the validity of research today

Digital Age Impacts

- The digital age has thrown the definition of "published" into chaos. Non-publishers can produce valid research and publishers can release invalid research just as easily.
- Some "new" sources of grey literature:
 - pre-prints, blogs, "front matter"
 - preliminary research results (open files)
 - Project Web sites
 - Institutional Repositories (IRs), data archives

Value of Grey Literature

- The first step in scientific research is a comprehensive literature review.
 - That step can be repeated multiple times during a research effort.
 - It is an iterative process to identify information necessary for the project and to ensure that they build upon the work of others.
- That process has to include grey literature as some primary sources are inherently grey. Those can include records, archives, data, filed notes, observations, data.

Findability Today

- The identification of published literature today is easy:
 - Publishers give metadata away
 - Aggregators then sell it as structured products
 - OCLC collects descriptions provided by publishers, libraries, etc.
- The challenge is the granularity of description
 - Books, chapters; journal issues, articles; figures, images, data, supplementary material

Findability and Grey Literature

- Without a conventional publisher, findability for grey literature relies on a variety of sources:
 - As cited references in journal articles
 - Within library collections
 - Within institutional repositories, and
 - in authors CVs
 - Good aggregators seek it out (very few today)
- These sources are usually not authoritative and rarely complete

Copyright and Grey Literature

- Copyright can be even more complex with grey literature. Some creators want their material used.
- Some sources are inherently in the public domain like materials from the U.S. Federal Government
- If unknown, copyright should be assumed. Both authors and the organizations they work for can claim copyright of works
- Creative Commons licenses are being used within some domains

Grey Literature has its Place

- Grey literature may not stand alone but it can contribute substantively to understanding scientific challenges
- Every source should be considered in the exploration of an issue
- In some domains, the best source of information may be grey
- Some grey literature goes through as stringent (or more) of a review as commercially published content

Grey Literature is Here to Stay

- Its value will always be a mixed bag
- There are risks involved in citing grey literature - those risks exist with commercially published literature as well, to a lesser extent
- Libraries need to continue to be involved in identifying it and defining its value
- Social tagging could be used to help people assess the validity of grey literature

The Future of Grey

- A new analogy is needed for literature that runs the spectrum of validity and findability
- The community should be able to contribute to validating grey literature
 - (and disputing the validity of some invalid published literature)
- Libraries should play a role in providing persistence for valid grey literature

Comments and Discussion

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