



Newspapers as a source of scientific information in social sciences and humanities: a case study of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Osijek, Croatia

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Session:

Session 119 — Users and portals: digital newspapers, usability, and genealogy — Newspapers with Genealogy and Local History

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyse the use of newspapers in scientific paper writing in social sciences and humanities. The study will be conducted within a context of a Croatian higher education institution: Faculty of Philosophy at University of Osijek. Scientific production (books, scientific and professional papers, etc.) of 138 researchers currently employed at this institution within nine academic departments (history, philosophy, psychology, education, information sciences, Croatian, English, German and Hungarian language) will be analysed. In the first phase, bibliometric methods and citation analyses will be used. It is expected that these results will indicate the importance of newspapers as a source of information in social sciences and humanities, especially in relation to different types and forms of newspapers and different categories of scientific work (such as research papers, theoretical papers, etc.).

Based on the results of bibliometric and citation analyses, in the second phase of the study interviews will be conducted with selected examinees who used newspapers as a research source extensively. It is expected that the results of interviews will give a more detailed insight into information behaviour of researchers in social sciences and humanities, in particular in relation to their usage of newspapers. Since the study will analyse scientific production of researchers at this institution who have published for many years it will be possible to analyse and describe the impact of new technologies on this particular aspect of their information behaviour.

Overall, the aim of this study is to contribute to better understanding of diverse aspects of newspapers use. Its results, it is expected, could ultimately have significant influence on the

1. Introduction:

It is well known that newspapers are very useful source of diverse information. They can be an important source of information for scientific research, especially in social sciences and humanities. Searching for such information can be very demanding and time consuming process. Therefore, heritage institutions that safeguard newspapers collection face many challenges in providing services to users. Three main challenges can be recognized in large number of newspapers, their material and content characteristics, and various user needs. Contemporary newspaper market is defined by a large number of newspaper titles and a variety of newspaper profiles. Information that can be found in newspapers is available in a number of other media, such as television and online media. Although a primary characteristic of newspaper information is its one-day lifespan and passing value, newspapers reflect all the sociological, political and cultural aspects of the society, as well as the spirit of a certain time. They are thus an irreplaceable source of scientific information.

Newspapers can be used as a primary or additional source of information for scientific research. That usually depends on subject area that is being researched. For example, linguistic research include newspaper corpus as a primary source for different linguistic analysis. For historic researchers newspapers are often used as an additional source of information that provides insight into historical context of past events. Therefore, demand of users can be rather different. Efficient organisation and preservation of newspapers collection is crucial in meeting those demands (Budd (ed.) 2002; Walravens (ed.) 2006, 2008, 2011).

In heritage institutions, newspapers were for a long time considered a material for which special preservation efforts should not be made, either because there were no conditions and means for their preservation, or because there was no developed consciousness about the need for their preservation. The disparity between the purpose of preservation and the nature of newspapers contributed to that. Namely, newspapers are created as a material of passing value that carries news for one day and can be thrown away after that. The paper on which newspapers are printed is of such a structure that it deteriorates extremely rapidly. Thus, the challenge of preservation and access in this case is preserving something that is not meant to be preserved, and investing great efforts into safeguarding something that is not meant to be safeguarded (Hasenay and Krtalic, 2010). Digital environment poses additional challenges to organising newspaper collections and designing services for newspaper users, especially for scientific researchers.

2. Newspapers as a source of scientific information in social sciences and humanities: a case study of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Osijek, Croatia:

The study presented in this paper was conducted within a context of a Croatian higher education institution: Faculty of Philosophy at University of Osijek. Faculty of Philosophy consists of nine academic departments (history, philosophy, psychology, education, information sciences, Croatian, English, German and Hungarian language) that conduct research in the fields of social sciences and humanities. Subject of this study was scientific production (books, scientific and professional papers, etc.) of 138 researchers currently

employed at this institution within nine academic departments. Their scientific production was analysed in order to determine usage of newspapers as a source of scientific information.

2.1. Aim and purpose:

Primary aim of this paper was to explore and analyse in quantitative and qualitative way the use of newspapers in scientific paper writing in social sciences and humanities with the purpose to indicate the importance of newspapers as a source of information in social sciences and humanities, and to give a more detailed insight into information behaviour of researchers in social sciences and humanities, in particular in relation to their usage of newspapers. Also, the aim of this study is to contribute to better understanding of diverse aspects of newspapers use that could ultimately have significant influence on the collection, organization and preservation of newspapers and the ways in which the new value added services are created on the basis of existing and future newspaper collections.

Research questions in this case study were:

How much are newspapers used as a source of information in overall scientific production of Faculty of Philosophy?

In which subject areas within social sciences and humanities are newspapers used?

In which categories of scientific work are newspapers used?

How have users used newspapers so far and how would they like to use them in the future?

What are user experiences and attitudes to using newspapers as a source of scientific information?

2.2. Methodology:

The analysis of using newspapers in scientific writing was divided in two phases. In the first phase method of citation analysis was used to investigate presence of newspapers in reference lists of all available papers of all employees currently working at the Faculty of Philosophy or retired within last year. Croatian Scientific Bibliography¹ and bibliographies on official institutions web site was used to access data. Citation analysis was chosen to give quantitative data such as the number of newspapers used as a source of information in overall scientific production of the institution, subject areas and categories of scientific work. Interview was used to gather qualitative data on experiences, attitudes and newspaper users' behaviour. Interviews were conducted with 12 examinees whose scientific production examined by citation analysis indicated extensive usage of newspapers as a source of information. Interview was semi structured, consisted of 11 questions on the perception and usage of newspapers, ways of searching for information in newspapers, experiences and limitations, and wishes for value added library services in the future.

2.3. Results and discussion:

¹ "Project Croatian Scientific Bibliography (CROSBI) started in 1997 with the main goal to collect the data on scientific output of the current research projects financed by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MSES) and to make them publicly available. Today CROSBI provides a comprehensive overview of all the literature produced by Croatian scientists: journal articles, books, book chapters, conference papers, theses, reports, manuscripts, etc." Available at <http://bib.irb.hr/index.html?lang=EN>.

Results of citation analysis of Croatian Scientific Bibliography and bibliographies on official institutions web site revealed that 125 papers out of 2425 total (5,2 %) has newspaper titles listed in the references. Dominant subject areas by number of papers are: history and linguistics (Croatian, English, and German), literature, information sciences and education (Figure 1). Researchers from departments of philosophy and psychology don't use newspapers as a source of information for scientific research. Newspapers are mainly used in research papers and books.

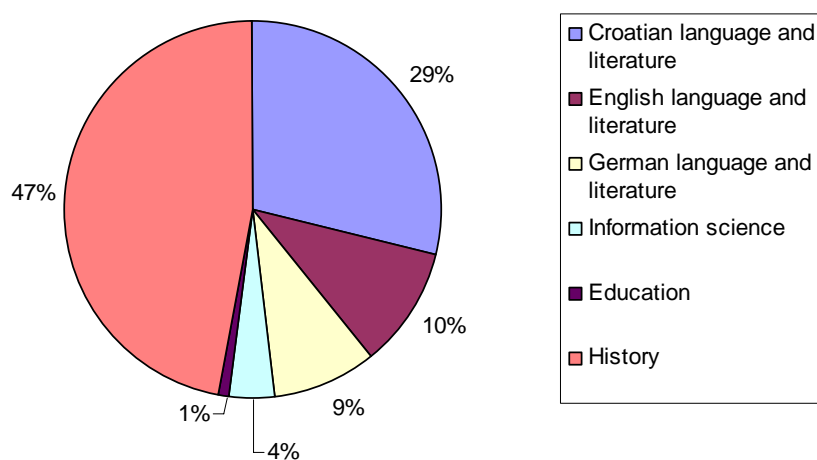


Fig:1 – Subject areas in which newspapers are used as a source of information (percentage of 125 scientific papers)

Qualitative analysis of interviews

Perception of newspapers as a source of information for scientific work

All examinees consider newspapers very important resource for scientific research. For historians they provide factual information about people, time and place often not preserved in other sources like archival material or published works. For educationists, newspaper offer possibility to explore education issues in social context offering them new insight into their research. Information science experts perceive newspapers as very important source in studying history of books, publishing and reading (especially links between these issues), access to information, history of communication media, as well as the source for studying visual communication and graphic design. Linguists consider newspapers very important resource for corpus based and corpus supported linguistic research. They use it extensively for diachronic linguistic analysis that shows development of language through time and synchronic analysis that shows linguistic phenomena in present time. Literary scholars (theoreticians) find newspapers crucial for discovering unknown literary works and writers.

"I am researching changes in Croatian language that have occurred at the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century. Newspapers are the proof that some linguistic phenomena were not only prescribed on paper, but have actually taken place in real life and real language." (Linguist)

Motivation for using newspapers as a source of information for scientific work

Using newspapers as a source of information for scientific work is natural and logical to most examinees. Their motivation and ideas for using newspapers come from previous research, whether from published articles of other authors or from their own previous research that opens new possibilities. Sometimes senior researchers encourage their assistants to use newspapers in their research. All examinees stated that they also encourage students to use newspapers as a source for writing their papers and diploma thesis.

"Not to use newspapers as a source of information would significantly diminish quality of my scientific work". (Historian)

User behaviour (usage patterns and habits)

Most examinees regularly use newspapers in their scientific work (as primary and additional source), and it is intensified with online availability and improved searching options. All examinees have used both online and printed newspapers (in libraries and archives), depending what is available and offered to them. Only one researcher used microfilmed newspapers. Many take pictures of parts of newspaper and work on their computer at work or home. Linguists prefer using newspapers through several specific online databases that offer possibilities to automatically research relevant words or phrases through newspaper content and make statistical calculations. To other types of researchers, such as historians, educationists, and literary scholars, automatic search is helpful but not crucial because they rely on qualitative analysis. They need to read through newspaper content, often page by page, and evaluate information in context. Researchers in the field of information sciences emphasized the need to research newspapers in printed form and pointed out that digitised material does not always satisfy entirely their information needs, because physical look (original graphic layout, margins, distribution of articles, title fonts) and material (type of paper, fibers, ink) are also important source of information.

"Reading and understanding newspapers greatly depends on the format of newspapers and page layout. The page itself determines the experience of reading, with its arrangement of articles, size of titles, margins, etc. Digitised newspapers do not provide for me the same reading experience." (Information scientist)

Experience with using newspapers

Although examinees have very positive general experience with using newspapers as a source of information for scientific work, they reflected on positive and negative aspects of using both printed and digital newspapers. Some problems with using printed newspapers are: it is a time consuming work; photocopies could not be made; not all needed newspapers were in one place; there were missing numbers in bounded volumes; if uncertainties occur during writing process, originals had to be consulted again. However; sometimes it is important to have original printed newspaper material. Historians stress out the psychological aspect of using printed vs. digitised newspapers – they sometimes value the feeling of a historical document and authenticity when they read printed newspapers.

Experiences with digital newspapers are positive, mainly because of the availability of research material on users' computer and fast searching options. Negative experience is the experience of reading, incomplete digitised newspapers, not good enough insight into the structure of newspaper number, etc.

"Maybe it's a habit, but original newspapers convey the spirit of certain time, they give the feeling of authenticity. Digital newspapers do not give that feeling; they are not always what you expect from newspapers."
(Historian)

Expectations in future

Majority examinees don't have any specific requirements for using newspapers in future. They want newspapers to be available to them without limitations in use; preferably online, free, through one place/portal with possibilities of advanced search through text and possibility of looking at newspaper as a whole, as similar as possible to original. One examinee stated that getting reprints on demand would be the kind of service he would appreciate. It does not matter to examinees whether services will come from libraries, archives or newspaper publishers. They would like to systematically connect all initiatives that provide access to newspapers, especially newspaper publishers' archives and library digitisation initiatives. Taking this into account, it is surprising that only one examinee was acquainted with the portal Croatian historic newspapers and journals.

"I think that all available services should be connected and cooperation should be established between libraries, archives, newspaper publishers, users, etc. In the end what matters the most is that newspapers are available when you need them. However, cooperation would probably result in high quality services to us, users." (Linguist)

Conclusion:

Methodology used in this study showed adequate for achieving aims of the study, and that was to explore and analyse in quantitative and qualitative way the use of newspapers in scientific paper writing in social sciences and humanities. Newspapers are very important source of information for scientific research, especially in the field of social sciences and humanities. Although relatively small number of researchers in this study used newspapers in their scientific research, those who did consider them crucial material for the quality of their research. It seems that many researchers still don't recognize the potential benefit of using newspapers in their scientific research. This is certainly a challenge for libraries and archives which invest great effort in collecting, organizing and preserving newspaper collections. Newspapers need to be brought closer to users. This challenge implies not only creation of new or value added services in digital environment and cooperation between potential partners, but also researching user behaviour, needs and demands.

This study confirmed the well known fact that both printed and digital forms of newspapers have their specific values that are of interest to users. This must be taken into account when planning newspaper preservation activities and digitisation projects. This study also shows that once a habit of using newspapers is created, researchers tend to extensively use newspaper collections and services of information institution further on, and pass that habit to other colleagues and students.

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