



Citation Analysis of M.A. Theses and Ph.D. Dissertations in Sociology and Anthropology: An Assessment of Library Resource Usage



Zila Rosenberg

Sociology & Anthropology Subject Specialist Librarian, Bloomfield Library for Humanities & Social Sciences, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mt. Scopus Campus, 91505, Israel

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ABSTRACT

The use of library resources by Hebrew University of Jerusalem Sociology and Anthropology graduate students was assessed through an examination of bibliographic references cited in a sample of theses and dissertations accepted during the academic years 2010–2013. Five variables were identified and quantified: type of material (monographs, journals, or other), format (print, electronic or both), language of material (English, Hebrew, or other), year and “age” of publication, and availability of item in Hebrew University’s library holdings. Results showed a larger percentage of citations to books than to journals, with predominant usage of books in print format and predominant usage of journals in print & electronic format, with English being the predominant language for all resources cited. The median age of cited material was 15 years, older for books than for journals. 95% of the journals and 82% of the books were available in the University library’s holdings. These findings present a substantiated appraisal of the University Library’s ability to answer the needs of its graduate students in the Sociology and Anthropology Department.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to present an informed assessment of library resource usage by Hebrew University Sociology and Anthropology graduate students. This was accomplished by analyzing 4904 bibliographic references cited in a random sample of 32 theses and dissertations, accepted during the academic years 2010–2013. This assessment of active collection usage focused on the following issues:

- What are the most frequently cited sources that graduate students in the Sociology and Anthropology Department use to conduct their research?
- Do the students rely more on monographs or on journal articles? What other types of material are utilized in their research?
- Is there a move towards making more use of digital resources? If so, can this trend be expected to continue?
- What use do graduate students make of English resources as opposed to resources in their native language, Hebrew, or other languages?
- Are the cited resources up-to-date or are older resources more prevalent in their research?
- Are there differences in the usage patterns of M.A. and Ph.D. students?
- Are their research needs being met satisfactorily by the Hebrew University’s library collection?

The results of this citation analysis can direct the subject specialist librarian in implementation of improvements in the current library collection and in decisions pertaining to ongoing collection management. An understanding of the particular needs of Sociology and Anthropology graduate students can help ensure that those needs are being met by the library.

BACKGROUND

THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, founded in 1925, is the leading research university in Israel and holds the prestigious rank of 59 (out of 500) in the 2013 Academic Ranking of World Universities. Alumni impressively place 17th and faculty place 39th for receiving the Nobel Prize or Field Medals (President’s Report to the Board of Governors, 2014, p. 8 online).

Hebrew University Faculty of Social Sciences is ranked 49th in the London Times Higher Education Survey (Report to the Rector, 2009, p. 32 online). The current student body of Hebrew University’s Social Sciences Faculty numbers 2183 undergraduates, 1094 Masters’ students, and 287 Doctoral students.

The Department of Sociology’s enrollment ranges from 79 to 92 M.A. students and 39 to 51 Ph.D. students per year for the years 2010–2013, in which period a total of 59 M.A. theses, and 30 Ph.D. dissertations were accredited.

E-mail address: zilar@savion.huji.ac.il.

THE BLOOMFIELD LIBRARY FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Bloomfield Library for the Humanities and Social Sciences, housed on the Mount Scopus Campus in Jerusalem, has holdings of approximately 1.1 million items in the English language and approximately 200,000 items in the Hebrew language. The collection includes 850,000 monographs, of which 541,000 monographs are in print format and 175,000 in digital format.

The library has ownership or access to 80,700 journals: 700 subscriptions to print format, as well as 525 subscriptions to “print & electronic” journals, of which 398 are in the English language and 127 in Hebrew. The library has 210 subscriptions to electronic journals in the English language and 10 subscriptions to electronic journals in the Hebrew language. The library subscribes to 35 aggregator packages of databases as well as 22 publishers’ packages, offering access to 215 digital databases. The primary full-text database in the field of Sociology and Anthropology is SocINDEX. Other databases include: Web of Science (WOS), ProQuest Central, Academic Search Premier (EBSCO), SCOPUS, MUSE and JSTOR. Google Scholar includes links to full text online articles that are available in the Hebrew University library’s holdings to its students and faculty.

There are 7700 M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations in the collection. As of 2008, all copies of dissertations must be submitted to the library in digital format, and a project to retroactively scan theses and dissertations that exist only in print format is currently in process. The Hebrew University Interlibrary Loan Department handled an average of 1407 book requests per year and 495 requests for articles from journals per year, during the years 2010–2013.

Collection development is guided by subject specialist librarians in cooperation with faculty, particularly the Academic Library Committee, with the shared aim of providing the best possible study and research environment for students and faculty. The academic librarian’s primary function is to effectively serve the information needs of the University’s faculty and student body. The Sociology and Anthropology subject specialist librarian shoulders the responsibility for understanding the particular needs of the Sociology and Anthropology students and faculty and for ensuring those needs are being met by its library.

The assessment of these needs can involve many considerations, especially a grasp of the users’ resource usage and of the current trends in research, both essential elements in providing a comprehensive, up-to-date collection for researchers. Other considerations include such factors as impact factor of journals, circulation statistics, interlibrary loans history, faculty recommendations, and bibliographic data culled from course syllabi or books and journals and most pertinent to this study – citations from theses and dissertations. Citation analysis is but one of the many tools librarians use to establish a basis for collection development and management decisions. Such an analysis is considered to be “empirically one of the best ways to measure past use of an academic library” (Sylvia & Leshner, 1995).

Some citation studies narrow their focus to the needs of a particular group of users, be it faculty, undergraduate or graduate students’ usage of the library resources, whereas other studies place the focus primarily on a specific discipline such as a particular field in the Sciences, Humanities or Social Sciences, and yet other studies engage in comparative studies contrasting groups of users or different disciplines. In addition, each research study attends to different nuances of assessment, for example, some pay particular attention to web usage or journal ranking.

The present study used citation analysis to provide a picture of active collection usage, specifically by graduate Sociology/Anthropology students. In Israeli universities, as in many others, theses and dissertations are expected to be an original piece of research, acknowledging all sources of relevant knowledge used in its preparation (Peritz & Sor, 1990). Citations reveal information regarding what types of information resources are being used, the proportional use of books and journals, the age of the materials referred to, the format used more often (print or

electronic), the language of the material cited, and which books and journals are the most frequently cited.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINITION OF CITATION ANALYSIS

Bibliographic data gathered and later analyzed, i.e., “citation analysis”, is praised as a well-studied method, proven to be effective in ascertaining trends of usage and in determining the usefulness of a collection. The basic ingredient of citation analysis, the “citation”, is defined as “a bibliographical entry in a footnote, reference list or bibliography that contains enough information, e.g., author, title, publisher, or journal title to verify the original item” (Leiding, 2005, p. 418). Citation studies use these source references as the basis for manipulation, research and study. Thus citation analysis uses citations as “signposts left behind after information has been utilized, and as such provide data by which one may build pictures of user behavior.” (Smith, 1981, p. 85). When the citations are analyzed as a group, the results can provide valuable insights into the development of a subject trend as well as user patterns and preferences.

HISTORY OF CITATION ANALYSIS

The first mention of “citation analysis” was reported in a 1927 study of chemistry journal citations by Gross and Gross, who pioneered citation analysis as a means of determining journals’ relative value to the collection. Citation analysis became a popular research tool, and underwent an especially dramatic change in the 1990s, when libraries and the academic community responded to the introduction of electronic resources. Numerous studies explore the correlation between the book usage and the use of web sources (examples are Boyce et al., 2004; Kriebel & Lapham, 2008; Rogers, 2001). The 21st century brought another dramatic change by globalizing knowledge. A plethora of citation analysis studies allow academic librarians the possibility of sharing their research studies throughout the world and the opportunity of viewing other current research studies from abroad (examples of such citation studies representing different countries include: Anunobi, 2002 (Nigeria), Feyereisen & Spoiden, 2009 (Belgium), Iivonen, Nygrén, Valtari, & Heikkilä, 2009 (Finland), Maz-Machado, Torralbo-Rodríguez, Gutiérrez-Arenas, & Morales Sillero, 2012 (Spain), Pancheshnikov, 2007 (Canada), Zafrunnisha & Pulla Reddy, 2010 (India), Riahinia, 2010 (Iran), Romić & Mitrović, 2014 (Croatia), Zong et al., 2013 (China)).

APPLICATION OF CITATION ANALYSIS: OBJECTIVES, USERS AND SUBJECT FIELDS

A considerable amount of literature has developed over the years to demonstrate, explore and explain the multiple and diverse objectives and applications of citation analysis in academic libraries.

APPLICATION OF CITATION ANALYSIS — OBJECTIVES

Citation studies conducted by academic libraries, well-represented in research literature, are conducted for various reasons. Some aim to improve and support collection management (examples are: Kushkowski, Parsons, & Wiese, 2003; Leiding, 2005; Feyereisen & Spoiden, 2009; Gooden, 2001; Miller, 2011; Pancheshnikov, 2007). Others work to create core lists of titles (examples are: Enger, 2009; Kaczor, 2014; Sylvia & Leshner, 1995; Waugh & Ruppel, 2004). A number of researchers have examined the use of materials in the Web environment (examples are: Conkling, Harwell, McCallips, Nyana, & Osif, 2010; Kriebel & Lapham, 2008). Others place the focus on information behavior and research skills of students for the purpose of evaluating library instruction (for example: Greenberg & Bar-Ilan, 2014). Yet others aim for quality assessment of bibliographic references (for example: Beile et al., 2004; Tunon & Brydges, 2005). The present study aims to better

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