How to Conduct Literature Surveys Using Multidisciplinary Databases (Part 3)

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Writing a good literature review is essential for any good research. In our previous articles in this series, we learned about databases used in literature review for life science and medicine. However, there are some databases that can be used for literature review of more than one subject. These are called multidisciplinary databases. Multidisciplinary databases for literature review are always a good resource to help researchers broaden the scope of their search. These help researchers find articles related to their topic of study that have been published by lesser known journals. They can also be a good way to find international research sources. This article will highlight the most popular multidisciplinary databases- Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar- and give an overview of their content and features.

Web of Science

The Web of Science is one of the most popular multidisciplinary databases used in scientific research community. It offers researchers a way to search four databases at

once: the Science Citation Index Expanded, Social Sciences Citation Index, and the Arts & Humanities Citation Index and Conference Proceedings Citation Index (Science and Technical Edition). It offers a unified platform to allow for a wide variety of search terms across disciplines. Web of Science also has links to regional citation indexes, patent data, specialized subject indexes, and an index of research data sets. The database gives complete bibliographic data and author abstracts. The researchers can search for publications by author, title, and institution, as well as by cited authors.

The combined publications available on the Web of Science total over 33,000 journals. Of particular note is the Conference Proceedings Citation Index (Science and Technical Edition) which allows access to published literature from conferences, seminars, workshops, conventions, symposia, and colloquia all over the world. This access includes conference proceedings and cited reference searching that allows researchers to expand their search beyond journal data.

Scopus

Scopus is another major multidisciplinary database that is used worldwide. It claims to have the "largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature." Scopus has a wider database of international resources than Web of Science. These resources offer smart tools to track, analyze, and visualize research. Scopus' smart tools also allow researchers to analyze journals. They can find out the number of articles published by a journal in a year, the affiliations and countries of the authors, and the subject areas the journal covers.

Scopus also gives researchers the tools to analyze terms by searching for the first time and their frequency of use over time. In fact, you can find out how often a certain term has appeared in Scopus publications from any date you choose. Scopus has other smart tools that allow you to search with self-citations eliminated. It also helps to find out an author's most highly cited paper, or find the most highly cited article in a journal. These search features can prove very helpful to writers who are looking to analyze larger publishing trends, terminology, or journal information.

Google Scholar

Google Scholar offers a simple way for researchers to do a broad search for literature. As apparent from the name, Google Scholar is a subsection of the larger Google search index and provides search results for both commercial and open-source publishers. One benefit of Google Scholar is that you can search any discipline or source from the entire web. Through Google Scholar, you can find peer-reviewed papers, books, abstracts, articles, and peer-reviewed papers. The sources as wide-ranging as universities, academic publishers, academic societies, and scholarly organizations. Book previews are available and searches are international, giving quick access to a wide range of information.

However, some criticisms of Google Scholar include the company's lack of transparency about its database contents and traditional search features. It may fail to pull the most

up-to-date sources, particularly in medicine. Much of its content is pulled from licensed publishing sources. Hence, a search of Google Scholar may pull up only the abstract of an article when a promising link is clicked. Logging in through one's academic institution prior to performing a Google Scholar search is a quick way to fix this problem.

It may be difficult to decide when you've done enough research, but using these comprehensive databases will ensure that you have access to the most up to date sources available. A reference manager can also help track your sources. Remember, a good literature review is the foundation of a good research. These databases can help you build that foundation.

Now you know about some of the databases used in literature review of subjects like life science, medicine etc. You also know about some of the multidisciplinary databases. Tell us which database you prefer and why. Please share your thoughts with us in the comments section below.

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