

## The use of grey literature in historical journals and historical research : A bibliometric and qualitative approach

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### Abstract:

Grey literature is generally accepted as an important part of scholarly communication especially in the "hard" sciences. Since little is known about the use and nature of grey literature in the humanities and specifically in the discipline of history, a systematic analysis was done to characterize the bibliographic references appearing in ten core history journals.

Methods: references from all research articles published in ten core history journals in 2005 were analyzed – five printed and five Open Access history journals - to determine the portion of references from grey literature. The Open Access history journals are free available on the internet. The references were analyzed and categorized according to the type of publication. The uses of grey literature in printed versus Open Access versions were compared.

It will be shown that grey literature as a primary source will be less important than in STM journals. Surprisingly the role of grey literature is of significance in Open Access history journals. The printed history journals show opposed results. Supplementary to grey literature is the development of the format of grey literature as aggregated historical datasets. These datasets are electronically available and will have an important influence on historical research if historians will get more confident in using these sources.

### Introduction

The fathers of history - the Greek Herodotus and his peers - didn't care too much about what truly happened in history. Their primary aim was to provide for stories that gave the ancient Greeks a cultural identity through literature or poetry. The literary format was important to legitimize their culture. They didn't think about standards of impartiality and objectivity which are embedded today in the practice of historian scholarship. These standards were the outcome of a process when history became a matured academic discipline. However the research subjects in history were long into the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused towards "Great Men" and the contextual wars, diplomacy and politics.

Only since the beginning of the 1960's there has been a steady evolution as historians learned from other disciplines and incorporated new innovative techniques and methodologies.

Economic and social science theories challenged existing historical narrative practices. New disciplines like historical demography, social and anthropological history and the use of quantitative methodology<sup>i</sup> opened the way for new perspectives of dealing with the past.

Although some historians felt unhappy leaving traditional narrative paths historical scholarship followed new standardized norms practiced by social science disciplines. The result was increasing differentiation of the discipline history into many sub disciplines. Depending on the type of specialization – methodology, subject and historiographic perspective - the historian's craft is humanities or social science discipline oriented or a mix of both.

### Bibliometric characteristics of history

Historical scholarship today offers methods and insights both from the humanities and social sciences. Systematic citation analysis can help us to understand the many qualities and structure of history as an academic discipline. Peters<sup>ii</sup> studied the sources used by historians in the United States who wrote about modern Germany. He asked the question if history should be considered one of the social sciences using the categorization of hardness and softness of a discipline based on three characteristics: the percentages of monographs and serials, the percentage of recent sources, and the percentage of self-citation.

Peters found that the ratio of monographs to periodicals (1.21:1) and the subject dispersion (18.1 percent) showed that history belonged with the social sciences. The percentage of recent references (9.5 percent) was the lowest for any discipline and showed that history should be considered one of the humanities.

These results, when combined, indicate that history is a soft social science that acts as a bridge to the humanities. There is a large variety in the use ratio of monographs to periodicals in historical studies depending on the type of historical scholarship. Traditional narrative oriented historical scholarship relies heavily on the use of monographs just as the rest of the humanities. Citation studies show a predominance of monographs between 60.6 % and 88.5% of the total of citations.<sup>iii</sup> Studies also show if history becomes more interdisciplinary oriented monographs are used less and journals are more favored as an outlet for scholarly communication. In such a situation the use of monographs varies between 36.4% and 64.1%