
What's new in Grey Literature? Everything from the textbook market to the blogosphere

Julia Gelfand (United States)

Abstract

Thanks to a variety of search engines and the advent of eScholarship, grey literature is both ahead of the curve as well as trailing. In the academic sphere the majority of new and different applications is in the textbook market. Also, till recently, the blogosphere was not part of the literary, political, scientific landscape. Today, it is right, front and center of all forms of debate and giving way to new community forums. Blogging as an activity and as a product shares many of the same attributes of the origins of grey literature.

Introduction

When searching for articles about grey literature or examples of grey literature one needs to exercise caution and always adapt the spelling for all forms of grey, meaning gray as well as grey. The continent of North America still seems to think of "grey" only in the aging sense and use "gray" for all things of or pertaining to color. I, like many colleagues around the globe observe both a greater volume of grey information/literature content and also a decline, as it is more ubiquitous with ePublishing and online content. Thanks to a variety of search engines and the advent of eScholarship, grey literature is both ahead of the curve as well as trailing. When one considers the new forms of grey literature, one is looking at a new mode of publication and communication. A more interactive paradigm is appearing and collections of resources that have common attributes are more easily traceable and useful. The publication, GreySource¹ provides a list of document types but does not specify formats. Assuming that more of this important content is being produced in or migrating to an electronic format, it has a home base of its origin and a compiler as well as the power of full-text searching that can retrieve it by a variety of search parameters. Thus, we must still determine if it is grey. The early definition of grey literature, suggests that it applies to content that is difficult to identify and process for library and archival collections. Less than a year ago, the definition was revised to reflect the increasing electronic formats and the source of origin, "Information produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in electronic and print formats not controlled by commercial publishing i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body."²

Today, the greater interest in grey literature is likely due to increased awareness of how to process a variety of electronic content, some that is acquired and licensed, some that is free and readily available to those who discover it on the Internet. The major contributions of this latter category are content now finding their homes in institutional repository (IR), both academic and corporate. The repository is being birthed and maturing at a fast pace at nearly every institution and thanks again to search engines who are promoting their wares.

The Textbook Market

Traditional scholarly publishing has changed greatly. In the academic sphere the majority of new and different applications is in the textbook market. A range of experiences in distance education with course-packs, eBooks, eReserves, and the use of the course management systems, instructors' personal webspaces and integrated media have all dictated that new forms of learning, reading and publishing are actively being used. Grey literature can describe all the products of these interfaces and experiences and can be increasingly complicated due to copyright and needed permissions. Today, instruction and curriculum resources are mainstream examples of grey literature as they are widely shared and ownership of the content both intellectually and as products can be debated. Private institutions such as Harvard and MIT are making course syllabi and content freely available on the net.

Another example of bygone grey literature is the dissertation. With the electronic thesis/dissertation movement well seasoned and very universal, the once proprietary