



**FACULTY OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA (UiTM)  
CAWANGAN KEDAH**

**IML251: INTRODUCTION TO INDEXING**

**ASSESSMENT 1 (INDIVIDUAL)**

## **ARTICLE REVIEW**

(Subject Indexing in Humanities: A Comparison Between  
a Local University Repository and An International  
Bibliographic Service)

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**28<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2021**

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## 1.0 ABSTRACT

Golub, K., Tyrkkö, J., Hansson, J. and Ahlström, I. (2020), "Subject indexing in humanities: a comparison between a local university repository and an international bibliographic service", *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 76 No. 6, pp. 1193-1214. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-12-2019-0231>

The title of this article is "Subject Indexing in Humanities: A Comparison Between a Local University Repository and An International Bibliographic Service". It was written by four authors which are Koraljka Golub, Jukka Tyrkkö, Joacim Hansson and Ida Ahlström. This article aims to compare between a local university repository and an international bibliographic service to improve the needs of the use of subject index terms in humanities journal articles. The article's structure is very difficult to understand, but the things that made the reader interested in reading this article is because of the title.

**Keywords:** Indexing, Humanities, Subject.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

This article shows that the authors wrote this article provide high-quality topic access to a diverse set of information items in digital services. According to studies, subject access in online library catalogues, repositories, and commercial services such as bibliographic databases and discovery services has been less than optimum and frequently fails to achieve specified bibliographic system objectives. Neither the world's largest commercial abstract and citation database Scopus nor the local repository of a Swedish public institution support established bibliographic aims to enable subject access for humanities journal articles.

It said that, as part of the overall growth of digital scholarship, several disciplines and research areas within the humanities have evolved new structures both within themselves and in connection to other disciplines within the humanities and outside. For several decades, scholars have been concerned about the special issues of indexing humanities research output. This study attempts to offer a representative picture of the current state of affairs in terms of the usage of topic index keywords in humanities journal articles, with special emphasis on the well-established subject access demands of humanities academics.

### **3.0 ARTICLE REVIEW**

In this article it shows that the world's largest commercial abstract and citation database does not effectively meet stated bibliographic aims to assure subject access for humanities journal articles. The indexing policies of the two services do not appear to fulfil humanities academic's demands for very detailed topic index terms with suitable aspects. There is no prescribed vocabulary for any of the humanities disciplines.

A popular form of inquiry in library catalogues is subject searching. Searching by subject is significantly more difficult. This is owing to the difficulty of crafting questions with limited subject matter expertise, as well as other related factors connected to information seeking, semantic ambiguities inherent in natural language, and so on. To address these issues, online search services could make subject terms from controlled vocabularies such as subject heading systems, thesauri, and classification systems available. It can assist the user in selecting a more specific concept to increase precision, a broader concept or related concepts to increase recall or determining which term is most appropriate for a specific concept. Cataloguing standards used in libraries and associated information services inspired guidelines for enabling subject access in bibliographic systems.

The roots of topic access guidelines in bibliographic systems may be traced back to cataloguing standards used in libraries and associated information services. Humanities publications are of interest to both students and the general public. So far, research has mostly concentrated on the information requirements of humanities scholars. The study found that the majority of searches were subject searches 91 percent of natural language expressions suggested a subject of some type, highlighting the importance of bibliographic databases enabling subject searching. All of these findings point to the necessity for a multifaceted approach to controlled vocabularies, such as the Arts and Architecture Thesaurus for visual arts, rather than pre-coordinated ones, such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings.

It states that combining free-text searching with controlled-vocabulary indexing is the most effective approach of searching databases in the humanities. Despite full-text indexing is useful for some purposes, it causes information overload and inhibits the searcher from acquiring a thorough perspective of a topic. If a query returns thousands of pages, few searchers will go beyond the first dozen or two results. Concerning the index, various terms from different times may have different meanings when applied to the same phrase.

To address the fact that nearly any topic may arise in humanities writing and that the same themes might be explored from a number of different angles, the indexing language for humanities must be wide. There are challenges in delivering subject indexing to support humanities scholarship. The common issues in providing topic indexing to assist humanities study are connected to the requirement to develop and deploy controlled vocabularies and indexing frameworks that are distinct from those used in the sciences in order to represent the various information seeking behaviours which are metadata inconsistencies and incompleteness, as well as the combination of restricted vocabularies, free keywords, and full-text automated indexing.

The study seeks to establish the existing state of things with specific reference to secondary sources in the humanities in order to assist enhance quality subject access to humanities materials. The Scopus user interface allows you to filter search results by "keywords" for Scopus index terms. This includes both "author" and "indexed keywords," according to the Help file. The advanced search interface also allows for the usage of field codes, which may be used to narrow down the choices to author keywords ("AUTHKEY"), indexed keywords ("INDEXTERMS"), or both ("KEY"). Those who do employ index words do so with the help of restricted vocabularies from outside the humanities (EMTREE; MeSH and GEOBASE).

To jump into conclusion, I can conclude that Future study should include subject indexing and retrieval studies of monographs and book chapters, which are frequent in the humanities but are likely to be less well represented and evaluated. Although considerable analysis had been done, after all not much has changed. This appears to be true for digital services such as repositories, but also web archives and digitised cultural heritage collections, as well as cross-collection search engines that appeal to all scientific subjects and sectors. Based on the demands of the user, interfaces should be built and tested to accommodate query expansion, word-sense disambiguation, and so on. Subject access in digital services for primary materials should also be investigated in order to determine the existing state of affairs and identify areas for improvement.

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# Subject indexing in humanities: a comparison between a local university repository and an international bibliographic service

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often fails to meet established objectives for bibliographic systems (see, e.g. Markey, 2007; Golub, 2018). While the services try to match users' expectations by implementing Google-like single search box interfaces, it seems that efficient mechanisms such as ranking algorithms used by

Subject indexing in humanities

## Abstract

**Purpose** – As the humanities develop in the realm of increasingly more pronounced digital scholarship, it is important to provide quality subject access to a vast range of heterogeneous information objects in digital services. The study aims to paint a representative picture of the current state of affairs of the use of subject index terms in humanities journal articles with particular reference to the well-established subject access needs of humanities researchers, with the purpose of identifying which improvements are needed in this context.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The comparison of subject metadata on a sample of 649 peer-reviewed journal articles from across the humanities is conducted in a university repository, against Scopus, the former reflecting local and national policies and the latter being the most comprehensive international abstract and citation database of research output.

**Findings** – The study shows that established bibliographic objectives to ensure subject access for humanities journal articles are not supported in either the world's largest commercial abstract and citation database Scopus or the local repository of a public university in Sweden. The indexing policies in the two services do not seem to address the needs of humanities scholars for highly granular subject index terms with appropriate facets; no controlled vocabularies for any humanities discipline are used whatsoever.

**Originality/value** – In all, not much has changed since 1990s when indexing for the humanities was shown to lag behind the sciences. The community of researchers and information professionals, today working together on digital humanities projects, as well as interdisciplinary research teams, should demand that their subject access needs be fulfilled, especially in commercial services like Scopus and discovery services.

**Keywords** Digital libraries, Digital humanities, Institutional repositories, Humanities, Knowledge organization, Bibliographic databases, Subject indexing Paper type Research paper

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## 1. Introduction

While support for subject searching has traditionally been advocated for in library catalogues, particularly since Cutter defined objectives for library catalogues (1876), research shows that subject access in online library catalogues, repositories and commercial services like bibliographic databases and discovery services has been less than optimal and



commercial search engines like Google, efficient exploitation of subject indexing or even quality-controlled subject indexing per se are still missing from these services, which leads to frequent retrieval failures.

The specific challenges of indexing humanities research output have been a cause for concern for researchers for several decades (Langridge, 1976; Tibbo, 1994). As part of the general development of digital scholarship, many disciplines and research areas within the humanities have developed new structures both within themselves and in relation to other

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disciplines within the humanities and beyond them (Borgman, 2007, pp. 212–224). For example, in the rapidly growing interdisciplinary field of digital humanities, it has become increasingly important to provide quality subject access to the vast variety of heterogeneous information objects catalogued by digital services. This includes both primary (see, e.g. Choi and Syn, 2016, on the use of tags in archival collections) and secondary sources, the latter being the focus of the present study. Although secondary sources in the humanities include monographs and book chapters much more than in the sciences, we will focus on journal articles because they tend to be more completely represented and reviewed in the bibliographic sense.

This exploratory study aims to paint a representative picture of the current state of affairs when it comes to the use of subject index terms in humanities journal articles, with particular reference to the well-established subject access needs of humanities researchers. The objective is to identify the needs for improvement in this specific context. The sample used comprises 649 peer-reviewed journal articles from across the humanities. The articles included are a part of the research output from an Arts and Humanities Faculty of a medium-sized Swedish university between the years 2010 and 2018. A comparison of subject metadata was carried out comparing DiVA, the university repository and Scopus. The university repository follows local and national policies, and Scopus claims to be the most comprehensive international abstract and citation database of research output (Elsevier, 2017), although it may be argued that the Web of Science is certainly comparable.

The paper is structured as follows. In the Background section, the stage is set by providing context on the objectives that subject access should meet in contemporary online search services, with particular focus given to the subject access needs of humanities researchers. A section on Methodology comes next, followed by Results. In the Conclusions section, a summary of the results is given, with suggested implications for future research and development.

## 2. Background

Subject searching is a common type of query in library catalogues (Hunter, 1991; Villen-Rueda et al., 2007), bibliographic databases (Siegfried et al., 1993), repositories (Heery et al., 2006), discovery services (Meadow and Meadow, 2012) and related digital search services (Patel et al., 2005). In comparison to known-item searching (e.g. queries for information objects whose title, author, etc. are known beforehand), searching by subject is much more challenging. This is due to the difficulties of formulating queries with insufficient knowledge of the subject matter, as well as for other related reasons to do with information searching, semantic ambiguities inherent to natural language, and so on. In

order to alleviate these problems, online search services (could) make available subject terms from controlled vocabularies such as subject heading systems, thesauri and classification systems, which can help the user select a more specific concept in order to increase precision, a broader concept or related concepts to increase recall, to disambiguate between homonyms or to discover which term is most appropriate for a specific concept. In addition, hierarchical browsing of classification schemes and other controlled vocabularies could help the user improve their understanding of their information needs, which could consequently aid the user to formulate their queries more accurately.

Guidelines for providing subject access in bibliographic systems have their origins in the cataloguing standards used in libraries and related information services. The objectives of library catalogues for subject access are originally anchored in Charles Ammi Cutter's "objects", as he called them, which are to (1) enable finding an item of which the subject is known; (2) show what the library has on a given subject and (3) assist in the choice of a book as to its topical character (Cutter, 1876, p. 5). These objectives have been an integral part of cataloguing codes for nearly 150 years and continue to be so in contemporary FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) family of conceptual models for catalogue functionality, which were in 2017 consolidated into the IFLA Library Reference

Model (IFLA LRM, International Federation of Library Associations 2017). In the context of

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subject access, IFLA LRM and FRSAD (Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data) tasks of finding, identifying, selecting, obtaining and exploring could be defined as follows:

- (1) Find: To find resources embodying works that are described by a given subject label, for example, search using a nomen that is used in a subject headings system or a classification scheme;
- (2) Identify: To clearly understand the nature of the resources found and to distinguish between similar resources, e.g. those that are indexed by homonyms or those with the same topic but from a different perspective (e.g. different branches of a classification system like virus from a zoological perspective versus virus from a medical perspective);
- (3) Select: To determine the suitability of the resources found and to choose (by accepting or by rejecting) specific resources that seem the most relevant, e.g. due to certain aspects, facets or approach to the subject described;
- (4) Obtain: To access the content of the resource;
- (5) Explore: To use the subject relationships between one resource and another to place them in a context, e.g. to browse around related topics such as through using related terms in a thesaurus or to see narrower and broader terms or classes, in order to understand the relationships between various nomens for an entity such as examine the variant names for a subject within a controlled vocabulary; survey the variant terms used in different contexts of use, which may include different languages; explore correlations between nomens for the same entity in different controlled vocabularies, e.g. finding a thesaurus descriptor which corresponds to a classification number.

Although publications in the humanities are also of interest to students and the general public, research so far has mainly focused on the information needs of humanities scholars.