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CHAPTER FOUR

completed study that answers many of his or her research questions, a careful reading of the work almost always reveals hints and suggestions for ways in which further research is both necessary and important; thus, such studies can result in important and beneficial shifts and modifications to the research proposal.

In traditional research reports and thesis designs, the literature review is placed near the beginning of the document. This should not be taken as a sign that the literature review is completed before other parts of the study commence. In our experience, creating, fine-tuning, and editing the literature review is an iterative and ongoing process. As the research proceeds, new problems and questions arise that require investigation and input from others—documentation of these questions and their resolution in the literature review enhances the value of the e-research project.

A well-done literature review will not just document the results of earlier studies. Rather, it will reflect on all aspects of the research process. Further, an excellent literature review has specific characteristics that separate it from a good literature review.

the mention of

- the theory that guides the research and helps to frame the research question;
- the methodology used, including the development of techniques and tools used for analyzing and interpreting the results; and
- the means by which the results are disseminated.

As a product, the literature review will serve both you and subsequent researchers as a record of and a set of pointers to the research that you have extracted from the large base of possible knowledge. It represents your informed extraction and synthesis of the extant research and thus is itself a valuable contribution. The literature review will also guide future researchers in understanding why you made the research choices that you did, help others to uncover and recreate the research process, and disclose the literature that you found of greatest value in your research efforts.

ENSURING QUALITY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEWED

There are five basic elements that academic researchers require of information sources (Kibirige & Depalo, 2000). These are accessibility, timeliness, readability, relevance, and authority. The use of a network changes our approach to, and means of, assessing these quality indicators, but does not change their importance. Nor does the use of a network change the need to access the literature (e.g., books, microfiche archives, and paper-based academic journals) from established libraries at universities or other educational institutions.

Accessibility

The most dramatic impact of a network on the process of building a literature review is the increase in accessibility. For most research, the locale for creating a literature

THE LITERATURE REVIEW PROCESS IN E-RESEARCH

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review has shifted from the stacks of the research library to the networked computer screen located in the home, office, or library. Until quit recently, a review of the for-mal published literature was a two-step process. The first step involved searching databases of published abstracts followed by the second step of retrieving the article from the paper or microfiche archives of academic journals, conference proceedings, and reference books. The Net has steadily eroded the time and effort required to undertake both of these by providing direct access to indexes, research data-bases, and to the full text of an increasingly large number of articles, reports, and scholarly books.

Accessibility is also increasing as a result of the surge of interest and product availability for wireless products. Although we are not swept up in the wave of hyper-bole that paints a picture of e-researchers completing their literature review while relaxing on a beach, jogging on a sidewalk, or driving to work, we do acknowledge that the amount of valuable research information available "anywhere/anytime" continues to grow. Networked information also