Defining Preprints: Integrating New Reference Types in a Large Bibliographic Collection

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Introduction

For over 25 years, the Bibliography team at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) has highlighted the use and impact of data in social science analysis, constructing a freely available, searchable bibliography for social science research data-sets and literature. As information sharing has become easier, less formal publication forms, like preprints, have grown popular across various disciplines and are now part of the scholarly communication in the context of preprints in scholarly publications, yielding 983 results to screen.

We created a definition of “Social Sciences” based on ICPSR’s broad definition and the University of Michigan Libraries Collecting Areas for the Social Sciences. We searched EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Scopus, and Web of Science for relevant databases searches for original preprint definitions (e.g., opinion pieces, Letters to the Editor). The items were imported into Covidence, a review management software used by the University of Michigan Libraries (Figure 1).

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was first designed and published in 2009 to aid reviewers in presenting their systematic review process in a clear, standardized way (Tricco et al., 2018). The PRISMA statement, which is the latest update on the checklist, is primarily focused on systematic reviews of studies evaluating health interventions, but many of the items are applicable in a range of different types of reviews, such as a scoping review in our present study.

Using Covidence, we screened 983 items from systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, we examined definitions from peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed publications to understand preprints comprehensively. The preliminary results of this qualitative research project are presented in this paper.

Methodology

We defined a scoping review in order to formulate a definition that will more effectively describe the works compiled in the Bibliography.

Using Covidence, we screened 983 items from database searches for original preprint definitions in social science references. Publications to existing definitions were tracked and added to Covidence. Two coders reviewed the articles with a third making final inclusion decisions. The final sample included 53 social science articles with original preprint definitions.

Results

This investigation revealed the major characteristic of preprints in the social sciences is that of the manuscript being shared prior to peer-review (Figure 3 and 4). As seen on Figure 4, 85% of sources in the review concluded that a preprint is a manuscript being shared prior to peer-review and 75% identified a manuscript as a preprint. For example, one paper provided a definition that a preprint should be well published with no publisher involvement, regardless of its peer-review status.

Preprint Characteristics (n=53)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Type</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preprint server</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available on a preprint server</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Summary

The results of this scoping review are presented in this paper. The data sharing approach to preprints are presented as follows (Figure 3 and 4). As seen on Figure 4, 85% of sources in the review concluded that a preprint is a manuscript being shared prior to peer-review and 75% identified a manuscript as a preprint. For example, one paper provided a definition that a preprint should be well published with no publisher involvement, regardless of its peer-review status.

Learning Objectives

Evaluate

Understand

Evaluate the effectiveness of the PRISMA framework to improve the inclusion and of preprints in bibliographic databases.

Endnote

ICPSR is part of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan.

References


Figure 1. Overview of the Covidence Review Process

Figure 2. Flowchart of the Covidence Review Process

Figure 3. Number of Sources Citing Characteristics of Preprints (n=53)

Figure 4. Distribution of Sources Citing Characteristics of Preprints (n=53)