

SOCIAL SCIENCES RESOURCES ON THE WEB: A CASE STUDY OF SOSIG WEBSITE

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Provides an insight into the concept of 'quality-controlled subject gateway'. Analyses 4,215 out of 19,765 records available in 19 major forms covering 17 broad subject headings in the field of social sciences on the Net through Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG) Website. Discusses the growth, salient features, search facilities, and subject-wise collections of SOSIG.

INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web and its associated Internet technologies have made it possible for several "Quality-controlled Subject Specific Information Gateways" to make their presence felt on the Internet. According to Koch, "Subject Gateways are Internet services which apply a rich set of quality measures to support systematic resource discovery"[1]. A large amount of electronic information resources in various forms such as e-books, e-journals, bibliographic and full text databases, online catalogues, reports, etc., in a specific subject area are made publicly available and accessible through Internet by these Information Gateways.

The Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG) is a freely available web based portal to select social science, business and law information accessible through JANET in the United Kingdom and worldwide through Internet [2]. SOSIG was hoisted in United Kingdom as a pilot project with an aim to provide fast and easy access to trusted source of select, high quality Internet information for research scholars, academia, practitioners, and librarians of social sciences. SOSIG provides this valuable

service in partnership with subject specialists based at the higher educational institutions in the United Kingdom by collecting, evaluating, organizing, and describing valuable social science information.

METHODOLOGY

For the present study, the SOSIG home page (<http://www.sosig.ac.uk>)[3] was explored and the content on the home page as reflected by hyperlinks were thoroughly reviewed. Data about the number of subject categories included, their sub-sections, types of electronic resources and the number of such resources under each subject category etc., has been gathered. Sample searches were made in the Internet Catalogue, Social Science Search Engine and the Online Thesaurus to evaluate the information retrieved in response to queries. Several other basic features of the SOSIG such as, *SOSIG Grapevine*, *My account services*, *search facilities*, etc. were assessed. The website was explored and the relevant data for this particular study were collected during 15th to 31st May 2002.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION

The present study reflects only the social science resources available on the Internet through the Website of Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG), UK. It excludes all other disciplines and other Gateways to social science resources available on Internet from the ambit of its coverage. This paper took into account those social science resources

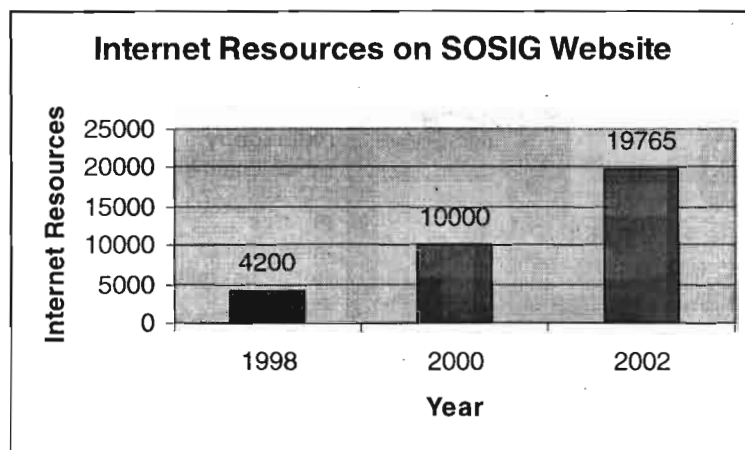


Figure-1

available on SOSIG website till 31 May 2002. Any information made available thereafter is out of the scope of this paper. Out of 19,765 records available online on social science information as of 31st May 2002, only 4,215 records available in 19 major forms of resources spread over in 17 main subject fields in Social Sciences were analyzed to draw statistical inferences.

SOSIG: THE CONCEPT AND GROWTH

SOSIG was launched in the year 1994 at the Institute for Learning and Research Technology (ILRT) at the University of Bristol, London. This project is funded by the premiere UK based institutions, i.e. Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), and the European Union (EU). The original concept was to help the researchers, academics and the library staff in locating networked information to support social science learning and research. Although SOSIG emphasizes on serving users in UK and Europe, any one can access its services from any where in the world. Since inception in 1994, the availability of networked resources on SOSIG witnessed a spectacular growth. As of July 1998 SOSIG contained 4200 Internet resources [4], which increased to over 10,000 in the year 2000 [5] and reached 19,765 Internet resources as recorded on 31st May 2002 (Fig. 1). By May 2000, there were more than 2000 users who had registered to SOSIG through

My Account facility to receive personalized services.

SALIENT FEATURES OF SOSIG

SOSIG has the following four basic salient traits that make its web resources popular.

Internet Catalogue

The SOSIG Internet Catalogue is an online database of high quality networked resources. The SOSIG team, consisting of subject experts and information professionals locate, access, evaluate and describe the different high quality networked resources from around the world. The catalogue is available through Internet. The catalogue currently contains 19,765 descriptions of resources in over a hundred and sixty headings ranging from Anthropology to Statistics. The Catalogue is browsable by subject area, titles, and keywords.

Social Science Search Engine

This is a separate online database of over 50,000 social science web pages. The resources found in the Internet Catalogue have been selected by subject experts, where as the resources in Social Science Search Engine have been collected by a software called 'harvester', similar to 'robots' or 'web crawlers' [6]. A 'harvester' assesses web sites automatically downloading references to links and other information from sites it visits. To a sample

Table 1 — Mapping of Subjects in SOSIG

Main Subject Headings	Number of Sub Headings	Main Subject Headings	Number of Sub Headings
Business Accountancy Management.....	05	Philosophy Ethics Logic Metaphysics	10
Economics Finance Trade.....	11	Politics International Relations Political Parties.....	18
Education Higher Education Teaching Methods....	13	Psychology General Psychology Social Psychology	18
Environmental Sciences & Issues Protection f Environment....	04	Social Science General Social Policy Social Science Methodology	02
Ethnology, Ethnography, Anthropology Anthropological teaching & Research...	16	Social Welfare Adoption Foster Care Social Work	22
European Studies	45 countries	Sociology Schools and theories Sociologists...	26
Geography Economic Geography Social Geography...	03	Statistics Demography Official Statistics	07
Government & Public Administration Local Govt. Policy...	16	Women Studies Women and employment Women history...	12
Law Law by Subject Area...	06	Total Sub-headings	234

(Source: <http://www.sosig.ac.uk/home.html>)

search made on the keyword “terrorism”, 98 valid matches were recorded, each containing a summary of the document, keywords and web address of its location.

SOSIG Grapevine

Grapevine is the ‘people oriented’ side of the SOSIG offering a unique online source of career development opportunities for social science researchers in all sectors. *Grapevine* focuses on information about academic events, conferences, courses, University Departments, CVs, like-minded colleagues, etc. *Grapevine*

carries details of relevant training and developmental information from employers and training providers. Researchers can also make their CVs available online which are freely accessible to all visitors to the site. *Grapevine’s Likeminds* section provides a forum for exchange of ideas and information about potential research opportunities and partnerships. For instance, a sample search was made to find forth-coming conferences in Economics. A list of 29 conferences was displayed with details of their title, venue, and date of beginning. The list also included the “*International Conference on Business-Social*

Partnerships beyond Philanthropy" that was to be held at Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta on 4th December 2002. Thus, it is evident from above that SOSIG *Grapevine* includes information from all over the world.

Classification and Automatic Indexing

The resources found on SOSIG have been classified according to UDC scheme but presented alphabetically for ease of use [7]. SOSIG has been experimenting to create an automatic classification system developed through DESIRE*[8] with the 'harvested' database. A very broad definition of social sciences has been used and the SOSIG resources have been catalogued into a subject hierarchy containing 234 subject headings organized under 17 broad main subject headings (as listed in the home page of SOSIG). The main subject headings and the number of sub headings under each main heading are given in Table 1.

My Account

My Account refers to the users' personal account on SOSIG. This feature enables the users to customize SOSIG to receive personalized services as per their needs. *My Account* is particularly useful in the areas of current awareness, career development, and publicity for conferences and courses. Users can set up a profile of interest based on subject selections using SOSIG catalogue and the harvested search engine. *My Account* helps the users to:

- ❑ receive weekly email notification of new internet sites, conferences, courses, colleagues from SOSIG (Current Awareness Service)
- ❑ find like minded colleagues who are working in the same subject field
- ❑ view conferences and courses matching the users' interest

- ❑ set up a web page on SOSIG that displays news and updates from selected sources

SOSIG SEARCH FACILITY

SOSIG provides a wide range of search options through the various search tools such as the Internet Catalogue, Social Science Search Engine, Online help on searching, and the Internet Thesaurus. The advance search option allows more precise searching within SOSIG and offer tools for enhancing and refining search strategies. SOSIG searches for terms located any where in a record but there are now options to restrict a search to the title, key-words, or descriptor field or to find resources of a particular type. A thesaurus is available since 1997-98 and it allows users to identify alternative search terms for use in SOSIG. Terms used in SOSIG thesaurus have been derived from HASSET (Humanities and Social Science Electronic Thesaurus) [4]. The presentation of the search results can also be customized by users through the advanced search option.

SOSIG COLLECTION

The collection at SOSIG has been considerably growing. As of 31st May 2002, SOSIG contained 19,765 records with 100 to 150 records being added each week (100 records were added from 28th to 31st May 2002). SOSIG has a formally stated collection management policy. It takes the help of qualified academicians and information specialists to carefully select and describe resources after an evaluation of their quality. SOSIG is not restrictive in the type of resources. Its collection includes any resources that support social science education and research. Unlike traditional libraries, SOSIG catalogues various meetings, discussions, support groups, mailing lists, projects in progress etc. SOSIG has also a policy of continually reviewing and improving based on user feedback and in response to the fast changing technologies and standards.

In the present study, only the number of different types of resources under each main subject

* DESIRE (Development of a European Service for Information on Research and Education): It is a major international project funded by European Union that aims to build large-scale information networks for the research community

Table 2 — SOSIG Collection on the Main Subject Heading

Forms of Information Resources	Business	Economics	Education	Env. Science	Ethnology/ Anthropology	European Studies	Geography	Govt. & Public Admn.	Law	Philosophy	Politics	Psychology	Social Sc. Gnl.	Social Welfare	Sociology	Statistics	Women Studies	Total
Articles (Collections)	28	60	33	10	06	-	10	28	-	14	42	-	35	02	17	08	13	306
Articles/Papers (individual)	02	15	21	14	01	-	00	67	-	01	55	-	19	07	00	25	17	244
Bibliographic Databases	07	28	19	08	02	-	07	12	-	05	08	-	32	01	06	07	10	152
Bibliographies	0	01	02	02	0	-	0	0	-	03	01	-	01	0	0	01	03	14
Books & Equivalents	0	06	05	04	01	-	01	09	-	25	18	-	20	01	03	06	01	100
Companies	20	13	02	06	01	-	0	11	-	0	05	-	02	01	03	09	05	78
Data	27	48	10	16	0	-	12	15	-	0	07	-	32	01	09	56	02	235
Educational Material	40	56	17	07	03	-	17	10	-	04	19	-	36	05	20	16	05	255
Govt. Bodies	18	21	38	29	0	-	07	168	-	0	12	-	53	05	03	0	08	362
Govt. Publications	01	04	09	02	0	-	0	106	-	0	07	-	02	03	01	64	06	205
Journal Contents & Abstracts	09	30	07	16	29	-	13	04	-	15	25	-	25	01	26	11	21	232
Journals (Full text)	16	20	24	09	14	-	05	15	-	11	24	-	37	0	18	09	15	217
Mailing list/Discussion Groups	29	25	19	09	02	-	08	06	-	06	14	-	25	0	19	18	14	194
News	44	32	04	02	0	-	02	26	-	0	56	-	52	03	0	0	01	222
Organizations/ Societies	31	46	57	53	12	-	29	41	-	10	77	-	85	17	41	29	67	595
Reference Materials	04	03	04	0	0	-	03	08	-	06	05	-	04	01	0	04	01	43
Research Projects	16	39	39	34	03	-	17	30	-	04	41	-	68	07	37	21	30	386
Resource Guides	38	34	26	17	05	-	18	40	-	17	29	-	31	04	25	12	62	358
Soft wares	0	02	01	0	0	-	01	0	-	0	0	-	01	0	0	12	0	17
Total	330	483	337	238	79	-	150	596	-	121	445	-	560	59	228	308	281	4215

heading have been reflected in Table 2. There are still thousands of such resources under each sub heading. Besides, SOSIG contains a large number of training and support materials such as road shows, posters, presentations, leaflets, online tutorials, etc.

Table 2 shows a total of 19 different forms of information resources in the field of Social Sciences included under SOSIG. These 19 different forms of information resources have a total collection of 4,215 items spread over 17 broad subject categories recognised from Business to Women Studies that fall under the ambit of social sciences.

Out of 17 subject categories, the sub domain of "Govt. and Public Administration" have a total collection of 596 (14.13%), and as such ranks first in order. This is followed by information items in "Social Science General", having 560 (13.28%), Economics with 483 (11.45%), Education with 337 (7.99%), Business 330 (7.82%) which rank second, third, fourth, and fifth respectively. The sub domain of 'Social Welfare' has meager collection of 59 items followed by "Ethnology and Anthropology" with 79 items.

With regard to the form of resources, "Organization and Societies" ranks first in the order having a total collection of 595 (14.11%) information items. This is followed by Research Projects having 386 (9.15%), Government Bodies having 362 (8.58%), Resource Guides having 358 (8.49%), Articles (collections) having 306 (7.25%) items which rank second, third, fourth, and fifth position in the order respectively. The three out of the 19 major forms of resources which have small collection are Bibliographies,

Software, and Reference Materials having 14 (0.33%), 17 (0.40%), and 43 (1.02 %) respectively.

CONCLUSION

In an ever-changing Internet based research and development environment, it is very critical for the continued success of subject gateways in satisfying user expectations. There has been continuous research in SOSIG to make its service faster with complete coverage of social information. It is moving towards its goal to form a "Virtual Social Science Community". It is working towards reducing the amount of traffic on the Internet and speeding up the response time for users. The growth of SOSIG is no doubt a pointer to make it as a "one-stop-shop" for the customers of social science information in future.

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