

Home	Table of Contents	Titles & Subject Index	Authors Index
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Book Review

Web Search: Public Searching of the Web. [Amanda Spink](#) and [Bernard J. Jansen](#). Published by [Kluwer Academic Publishers](#), P.O. Box 17, 3300 AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 2004, XIII, 199 p., Hardcover, ISBN 1-4020-2268-9, 100.00 €.

If you would like to know how people usually search the web and what they mainly look for on this ocean of information, you need to review the research findings of a fairly new area of investigation which focuses on the user-oriented aspects of people's web-based information seeking patterns. This line of enquiry is related to three broader areas including information retrieval (IR), information seeking in context (ISIC), and human computer interaction (HCI).

A glance at the literature of these three areas shows that the number and the diversity of publications about different aspects of web searching have increased over the recent years. Up to now these publications have mainly appeared in journals or conference papers principally because web search research is a quite new area and the results of recent research firstly appear in these formats. Consequently, the lack of a book which entirely focuses on this issue was an evident gap in the literature body. Luckily, when "*Web Search: Public Searching of the Web*" written by Dr. Amanda Spink and Dr. Bernard J. Jansen was published by Kluwer Academic Publishers in 2004, this gap was partly filled. This book is one of the first texts in book format; perhaps the first one; which is exclusively on the subject of web search research.

The authors are well-known researchers in the area and they have already published many papers about their studies on web search research and this book also is mainly a collection of their studies' results between 1997 and 2004.

One of the explicit features of this book is its clear approach in addressing a specific aspect of web searching, which is the user side of this procedure. Web searching is a multifaceted issue and for that reason can be investigated based on different approaches. In fact, there are three key elements or three major levels which are involved in web searching procedure.

The first element is the technical side or software level of web searching that is the product of programmers and designers of search tools. The second part is the web contents which basically can be produced by almost anyone how have access to the web space and as a result, now, the web environment is the most heterogeneous source of information in the world. Eventually, the third key element is the web users that millions of them search the web everyday.

Research and practice on the first element (software level) is related to computer scientists and the second one (web contents) is primarily related to website designers and information providers. Research on the third element is a challenging research topic for information specialists including people who work in IR, ISIC and HCI areas. Research on

the third element is a challenging task because it has its own complexities since this is associated to human mind and complex patterns of human information seeking behaviours.

This book entirely focuses on the research on the third element and this is one of the main outstanding features of the book as this line of enquiry has a short history and our knowledge about this area is still very limited. Therefore, publication of this book can be considered as a notable contribution in the area. In terms of the contents, "*Web Search: Public Searching of the Web*" is a selective collection of a number of studies on the user-oriented investigations addressing people interaction with web-based search tools.

The book consists of four sections including (1) *the context of web search*, (2) *how people search the web*, (3) *subjects of web search* and (4) *conclusion: trends and future directions*. The first section includes three chapters addressing a brief but informative introduction about the main involved elements of web search process and web search research including search engines mechanism, human computer interaction in web searching and research design in web search studies.

The second section also encompasses three chapters addressing three important aspects of public web searching procedure, which are search terms, search queries and search sessions. These three variables are the key elements in quantitative research on web searching. This section presents a number of detailed and large data sets from transaction logs of three major search engines to illustrate the most frequently occurring terms which people have used as keywords for searching the web. This section also is followed by presenting a deep analysis of public search terms and search queries to illustrate public trends on selecting search terms over a period of time.

The third section contains four chapters to present the results of research on the public major search topics. The last section includes only one brief chapter, which summarizes the key findings of the authors' studies and indicates the future lines of inquiry.

In general, this book provides the reader with an opportunity to learn more about the public search behaviour on the web based on some factual data collected through people interaction with some of the general search engines including AltaVista, AlltheWeb, Excite and AskJeeves.

The past research on web searching indicates that the majority of web users begin their search process through one of the conventional search engines. They usually search the web through the same search engines unless they find a more efficient one. Consequently, in order to illustrate a fairly realistic picture of web searching patterns, transaction logs of the search engines can be a reliable source of data. However, exploring public web searching patterns merely based on quantitative data of web searchers has its strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, any set of this kind of data is rich, genuine and huge. It is genuine because it is collected through the real web search experiences and it is huge because the numbers of people who use these search tools are enormous. Furthermore, this data is a good representative of the current heterogeneity of the web users because different people from diverse categories use search engines and as a result the transaction data of these search tools represents a big variety of groups.

On the negative side, a large set of quantitative logs of the data cannot provide us with deep understanding of people information seeking pattern on the web. Logs just tell us what people actually do but, it does not let us know what they really want to do or what they think about what they have done. In fact, by this method of data collection we are not able to find out about their intention, feeling and motivations. In order to fill this gap we need to carry out more qualitative research to answer those questions which remain unanswered in quantitative research.

"*Web Search: Public Searching of the Web*" mainly presents a quantitative approach of web search research, which is obviously an important fraction of this area of study. Nevertheless, if the book could cover more qualitative studies as well, it could help to increase the comprehensiveness of this book.

In terms of the writing style, this book has written in a very plain manner which seems easily understandable for readers. In conclusion, this is a very useful and reasonably comprehensive book for everyone who likes to know either how people search or what people mainly look for on the web. Also it would be very helpful for students who want to learn how researchers carry out studies to find out the answer of these questions. In the other word, the book not only presents a set of facts to answer these kinds of questions but also has an educational aspect in that it explains research methodology required for conducting web search research.

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