



An analysis of the development and use of theory in library and information science research articles

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Abstract

This study identifies the state and characteristics of theoretical research in library and information science journals by examining the number and the quality of theory incidents. Theory incident is characterized as an event in which the author contributes to the development or the use of theory in his/her own paper. This study assumes that both theory building and theory use are intertwined to construct a cohesive body of knowledge in the field. Theory incidents were identified by a content analysis of 1661 articles in four LIS journals from 1984 to 2003. The findings suggest that 41.4% of the articles contributed to the development or use of theory. The overall proportion of theoretical articles has increased. They showed a tendency to converge into a few subfields, such as information seeking and use or information retrieval. However, the declining share of theory development articles in recent journal issues and the overall low level of theory incidents are urging LIS researchers to the importance of continuous and creative research in LIS.

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1. Introduction

A direct investigation into the existence of theory in library and information science (LIS) literature allows for evaluating the nature of theoretical research in the field. The

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