ONLINE

Scholars Note 'Decay' of Citations to Online References

By SCOTT CARLSON

Michael Bugeja says that when he got his doctorate in English, he studied the difference between "fair" and "foul" copies of Shakespeare's plays -- a foul copy being rife with inaccuracies.

"That's because the medium of printing was unstable back then," says Mr. Bugeja, a professor of journalism and communication at Iowa State University.

Now that the Internet is the new unstable publishing medium, he and a colleague have studied how Web links stop working, or "decay," as those sites change addresses or shut down. They focused on links used by scholars in footnotes that cite Web materials.

After analyzing more than 1,126 citations that make reference to Web addresses, taken from online versions of five prestigious communication-studies journals, 373 of the links, or 33 percent, were found to be dead. Of the 753 of the links that worked, only 424 pointed to information pertinent to the citation.

Mr. Bugeja and Daniela Dimitrova, an assistant professor of communication at Iowa State, looked at footnotes from 2000 to 2003 in Human Communication Research, the Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, the Journal of Communication, Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, and New Media & Society.

"The erosion of footnotes," Mr. Bugeja says, "might put us back to a curious situation, wondering whether we have a fair copy of a journal article or a foul copy of a journal article."

In some journals, the decay rate was particularly high. For example, of the 265 citations in New Media & Society articles that included links, 167 did not work.

Steve Jones, a professor of communication at the University of Illinois at Chicago who is an editor of "New Media & Society," called the decay of online citations "a real issue" that the journal has begun to examine.

He wonders whether copyright law might someday allow scholars to copy and archive online articles that they used as sources. But he says such a solution is "pie in the sky."

Anthony T. Grafton, a professor of history at Princeton University who has written a book about footnotes, has read a draft of the study and agrees that citation decay is "a real problem."

"I'm looking at a world in which documentation and verification melt into air," he says. He sees this
problem growing, as today's students rely more on online sources. "My students come to college less and less able to negotiate a book landscape and more and more adept at negotiating the Web."

Mr. Bugeja and Ms. Dimitrova are preparing their findings for publication and are coming up with a list of recommendations to stop the decay of online citations. Their findings and recommendations will be presented at the International Communication Association conference in May.
Persistence and decay of web citations used in theses and dissertations available at the Sokoine National Agricultural Library, Tanzania. Alfred S. Sife and Ronald Bernard, Sokoine University of Agriculture, Tanzania. ABSTRACT. Scholarly writing requires that authors make reference to the previously published works by mentioning the authors inside their works (in-text citation) and giving bibliographic details in the lists of references. Citing URLs in the lists of references is an academic requirement which stems from the assumption that a particular information resource will continue to be located at the cited URL. However, continued availability of web resources is often not guaranteed as they may disappear intermittently or permanently from their locations. Google Scholar or Pubmed or Web of Knowledge etc should be able to discern that. What might be the case, I suspect, is that your own name is not the same between your google scholar page and the name you used in your publications. That might be the case if you have multiple middle names (and/or initials). It is possible that citations to your work are not recognized by Google Scholar because of errors in (or incompleteness of) the reference string. Such 'stray' citations can be corrected, see Anne-Wil Harzing's guide to correcting stray citations in Google Scholar. Note that the same problem occurs in all citation databases to some extent. Most of them have some mechanism for reporting and correcting (besides Google Scholar, at least Web of Science and Scopus do). In-text citations are brief references in the running text that direct readers to the reference entry at the end of the paper. You include them every time you quote or paraphrase someone else's ideas or words. An APA in-text citation consists of the author's last name and the year of publication (also known as the author-date system). If you're citing a specific part of a source, you should also include a locator such as a page number or timestamp. For example: (Smith, 2020, p. 170). Note that if you're not signed in, your reference list is stored as a cookie on your browser, which means you can easily lose your work. Be sure to download a backup on a regular basis, or sign in to store it in your account automatically. What does a citation generator do?