



Running Case Study 3

Visiting the library

Mehmet

Mehmet has always loved to talk to people much more than reading. If he was planning a weekend trip to Barcelona, he would rather talk to a friend who had been there than buy a pocket travel guide. At university he preferred to read textbooks and applied articles rather than the often dull articles in so called 'A-journals'. When he started with his thesis, he heard via a friend, that a friend of friend called Hassan studying sociology had just finished a dissertation on migrant entrepreneurship. He had called Hassan and Hassan had emailed him his thesis. Hassan's thesis was about what municipality could do to encourage entrepreneurship among migrant minorities. To Mehmet's surprise, it did not have any empirical part except for two interviews with a deputy mayor of Utrecht and a local entrepreneur. Nevertheless, it had an impressive reference list and Mehmet used the introduction chapter to write his proposal. Mehmet did not copy a single sentence of Hassan's thesis; he just used parts of the structure and then wrote his own text. Moreover, rather than reading all the articles, he trusted the summaries in Hassan's dissertation. That saved a lot of reading time.

Later on, the literature discussed in Hassan's dissertation became the backbone of Mehmet's theory chapter. But Mehmet did more. In his many talks with people he collected a lot a written documentation including PR material, newspaper clippings and official reports. Mehmet thought that this literature was much more informative than the articles in academic journals. First, many articles in the journals referred to studies in the USA and Mehmet was convinced that the situation in the Netherlands was completely different. You could simply not compare Afro-Americans in Chicago with Turks in Amsterdam, they had nothing in common. Second, in his view the scientific studies seemed to forget the migrant entrepreneur. Just a few qualitative academic studies included citations of entrepreneurs, while other researchers had apparently not even talked to a migrant entrepreneur. One study in a prestigious journal was based on data collected from the Dutch statistical office – the three authors were a native Dutch and two Americans, one with an English name and the other with a Chinese name. How could they write about migrant entrepreneurship in the Netherlands? Mehmet had a strong feeling that in the prestigious journals, missing knowledge of the field was camouflaged with complicated statistics that only a few enlightened people could understand.

Rebecca

Rebecca's approach was very different from Mehmet's. Her first step was a visit to the library and she spent days walking through the stacks and browsing electronic databases. Even at night at home she browsed through these databases.

Rebecca started her search on Google scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>) with the words "students' ethics" which resulted in 1,210 hits. Although Rebecca loves reading, that seemed too much even for her. Thus she combined "students' ethics" with other search terms. The table below shows how many hits were generated for the combination of "students' ethics" with each other term.

Number of hits for "students' ethics" combined with . . .			
Response*	449	Reaction	98
Sanction*	104	Consequence*	337
Coping	50	Plagiarism	120
Factor*	482	Cheating	181
Determinant*	42	"empirical study"	74
Explain*	377	Survey	461

Looking at the results, she was surprised to see that many references were useless, as those studies did not look at how ethical students behave, but rather looked at which students were more likely to choose an ethics course or how one should design an ethics course.

Nevertheless, she printed out the result lists and started to highlight those articles that seemed interesting to her. Later on, she identified the articles that came up on multiple lists. In the end, she had a list of 37 articles, which she started to retrieve from the databank. After reading the abstract, she decided whether she would print it or disregard it; she printed 31 articles and started reading. While reading them, Rebecca discovered more and more articles through the references provided. Rebecca started to understand why good references are so helpful for a reader. It did not take long for Rebecca to develop some idea which scientists were most interested in the topic. Out of curiosity she searched for the home pages of these people. What would they be like? On the authors' homepages, she learnt that one was an amateur photographer, while another had won an Olympic silver medal in archery. Rebecca did not even know that archery was an Olympic discipline. Next to this more popular information, Rebecca also discovered that some scholars offered downloads of their articles and working papers on their websites. The working papers were especially interesting, as they were much more recent than the articles and therefore also contained more recent references.

In the meantime, Rebecca had studied about 70 articles. She had not read all of these articles from the first to the last letter, but she had at least read some paragraphs of each. Slowly she had the feeling that additional articles did not offer new insights and that the same articles were always cited. Of course, now and then she would discover a new reference, but mostly these 'new' articles were very similar to those she had already read. But how could she be sure that she had read all the relevant literature? And there was another concern Rebecca had. The previous weekend she had visited her parents and discussed her research project with them; her mother especially had been very interested in it. She had given her a stack of books on ethics. Up to now she had not really looked at those books, but looking through her list of literature, she realised that the scientific literature hardly referred to the classic works her mother had lent her. How could that be?

- 1 Discuss how Mehmet and Rebecca conducted their search for literature.
- 2 Think about the search queries used. How could one improve them?
- 3 Discuss the Internet as an information source.