

Tech Session: Reference Rot and Link Annotation

Wednesday, 17 June 2015 14:40 (35 minutes)

Scholarly communication has undergone a dramatic shift from a paper-based to a web-based endeavor. Referencing sources, however, remains a fundamental part of the scholarly discourse. In today's articles we increasingly find references to scholarly assets such as software, ontologies, project websites, presentations, blogs, videos, tweets, etc. These resources exist on the web at large and are therefore immediately accessible via their HTTP URI but they are also subject to one of the most detrimental characteristics of the web: reference rot.

In this talk I will cover two main topics: First, I will showcase our recent study that investigated the extent to which more than 3.5 million scholarly science, technology, and medicine (STM) articles published between 1997 and 2012 are subject to reference rot. We extrapolated our results to the scale of the entire STM article landscape in the United States and I will present our eye-opening findings.

The second focus of my talk will be our proposed approach to mitigate this problem: link decoration. The idea is to enhance links to web at large resources with additional information such as a reference to an archival snapshot of the resource at the time of referencing and the datetime of linking while retaining the original reference to the web resource. In case the referenced resource becomes subject to reference rot, an interested party can either refer to the archival snapshot or use the original reference and the linking datetime to obtain the desired content from web archives. I will demonstrate how tools such as the Memento Time Travel extension for Chrome make these link decorations easily accessible for everyone.

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