

Public Abstract

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Title:GOOGLE SCHOLAR AND META DESCRIPTIONS: DOES ADDING ABSTRACTS TO A SEARCH ENGINE RESULTS PAGE AID IN UNDERGRADUATE DOCUMENT TRIAGE EFFICIENCY?

By focusing on the point where the document triage process interacts with a search engine results page (SERP), this experiment extends our knowledge about both SERP design and document triage behavior. Prior SERP work has shown that longer meta descriptions in SERPs improve people's ability to answer information based questions, while document triage research has shown the importance of abstracts in making relevancy decisions. Using eye tracking equipment this work employed a repeated measure within factors experimental design method replacing the existing Google Scholar (GS) SERP meta descriptions with the abstracts of the corresponding retrieved articles. Undergraduate freshmen participants were asked to use two different GS SERPs, one with a control design and one with the experimental design and determine which resources are relevant to their assigned research task.

The findings show that the participants changed how long they looked at the expanded meta description, while noticeably reducing how long they gazed at other parts of the page supporting other research findings. The addition of abstracts changed user behavior by reducing how often they made surrogate level document transitions, but did not change how often they sought out full-text documents, supporting the principle of least effort. The addition of abstracts did not contribute to changes in total time on task or participant's relevancy accuracy. This study's findings conflict with other work that found that longer meta descriptions corresponded with a reduction in total task time and an improvement in accuracy for informational tasks. Further research is needed to determine if this conflict was due to task differences or if the document triage task was not challenging enough.