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The relevance of impact: bibliometric-enhanced legal information retrieval

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Summary

Legal professionals spend up to a third of their time doing research. During this research legal information retrieval (IR) helps users find information that is relevant for them. These legal IR systems are important because the number of legal documents published online is growing exponentially.

This research addresses the question: how can bibliometrics improve common ranking algorithms in legal information retrieval?

Chapter 2 focuses on the users of legal IR systems. Users were surveyed to determine whether legal practitioners (searching for themselves) and information professionals (searching for others) have the same perception of relevance. This was done by comparing the factors of relevance they consider then evaluating search results. We found no reason to distinguish between these user groups. With regards to the distinction between legal scholars and legal practitioners, it was determined in Chapter 3 that the usage and citations between scholarly and non-scholarly publications show no reason to create separate rankings users based on their affiliation.

Chapter 3 regards the documents in the legal IR system. The citation and usage analysis provided the theoretical insight that citations in legal documents measure part of a broad scope of impact, or relevance, on the entire legal field. Using this information a bibliometric-enhanced ranking variable was created.

There are several challenges to evaluating a live domain specific IR system. Chapter 4 deals with these challenges and why common evaluation methods in IR are not applicable. In the end, in Chapter 5, a cost based model is used for evaluation, which shows a reduction of cost for the user.

Combining all this information this thesis shows that a bibliometric-enhanced ranking feature that takes into account both usage and citations (two flavors of impact relevance), and increases in influence as the reliability of the data grows (in combination with a recency feature that gives new documents the benefit of the doubt and decreases at the same rate as the bibliometric feature increases), can reduce the cost required from legal professionals (whether practitioner, scholar or legal information professional) to find the point of satisfaction in the completeness ideal/research reality trade-off.